

**A SAGA OF BLACK DEGLORIFICATION:  
THE DISFIGUREMENT OF AFRICA IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S NOVELS**

by

Moses Geoffrey Kwame Ayivor

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The focus of this dissertation is the thesis that if Ayi Kwei Armah's five novels – *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Fragments* (1969), *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1978) – are closely analysed, they will emerge as a single creative mythology devoted to the fictional disfigurement of Black Africa from primeval times to the present. An analysis of African writings reveals that a body of contemporary African literature has and is still undergoing a distinctive metamorphosis. This change, which amounts to a significant departure from the early fifties, derives its creative impulse from demonic anger and cynical iconoclasm and is triggered by the mind-shattering disillusion that followed independence. The proclivity towards tyranny and the exploitation of the ruled in modern Africa is traced by radical African creative writers to an ancient source: the legendary and god-like rulers of pre-colonial Africa. Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*, Wole Soyinka's play, *A Dance of the Forests*, and Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* hypothesize that past political violations begot the present wreckage of the African populace. The legendary warrior heroes of the past, whose glory and splendour were once exalted in African writing, are now ruthlessly disentombed and paraded as miscreants and despots, who brutalized and sold their people into slavery. Although Armah glorifies "The Way" in *Two Thousand Seasons* and "the metaphysics of African healing" in *The Healers*, the dominant preoccupation of two novel histories is to divest the ancient godlike kings of their false glory.

In Armah's postcolonial fiction – *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* – the theme of tyranny and political corruption is linked to the colonial middle class elite and the ancient kings. Armah achieves this didactic creative purpose by exploiting a plethora of symbols, images, scatology and dystopian metaphors, particularly in *The Beautiful Ones*. Unlike the heroes in the two histories, Armah's postcolonial protagonists are so intensely paralysed by unrelieved despair, passivity and self-alienation that they hardly function as conventional heroes. Instead of the traditional hero, Armah's modern principal characters like the Man, Baako, Modin and Solo operate as anti-heroes or marginalised beings, trapped permanently in limbo. Despite the debilitating environment which shapes and informs them, the postcolonial heroes are committed to using their talents in transforming the society and empowering the dispossessed masses. The thesis is divided into six chapters, a short introductory chapter and a short concluding chapter.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction: Ayi Kwei Armah's Dominant Mythology

The title of this dissertation, *A Saga of Black Deglorification: The Disfigurement of Africa in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels*, prescribes a rather negative role for me – a critical role which I need to play in order to substantiate the thesis. Despite the limitation of this critical function, my attitude to Armah in this study is a rather ambivalent one, since there are occasions in which, instead of the usual negative criticism, some of my commentaries on Armah are complimentary. A close analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels – *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Fragments* (1969), *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1978) – reveals that the five works are preoccupied with the African leadership's betrayal of the African Continent. The thesis contends that the corpus is informed by an ingenious unity of thematic and creative ideas. The themes such as the corruption of the ruling élite, the Middle Passage, and parasiticism of the political leadership which are introduced to us in *The Beautiful Ones* resurface in the rest of the novels. The narrative modes of *in medias res*, *images of decay* and *disintegration*, *ironic reversals loaded with sardonic humour* and *paradoxes*, which dominate *The Beautiful Ones* are orchestrated in the corpus.

In writing the five novels Armah self-consciously exploits two distinct stylistic forms: the opaque metaphorical language which dominates novels with postcolonial settings as well as the non-figurative style bordering on matter-of-fact narrative form which Armah exploits in his two historical novels. The style of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* emerges as the most intricate and the most metaphorical. The style in the first novel is a maze of multifarious scatological symbols and dystopian metaphors that defy simple interpretation. The stylistic patterning in the second novel, *Fragments*, is more complex and metaphorical than that of *Why Are We So Blest?*. In this work Armah creates a re-Africanized style which is a reassemblage of Akan traditional motifs, rituals, icons, and symbols – a narrative structure which incorporates the multi-layered labyrinthine living world of the Akans. Although the style in *Why Are We So Blest?* is more figurative than that of *Two Thousand Seasons*, it is less dense than the stylistic patterning in the first novel. As we move to the novel histories, we notice that the style is predominately less metaphorical. Armah's style in *Two Thousand Seasons* is characterized by the direct use of



language. In *The Healers*, Armah continues to exploit this direct use of language, a form of narration which is akin to the narrative mode of history and historiography. There is, however, a significant stylistic shift in the fifth novel. The simple direct style exploited by *The Healers* conceals a thick Akan iconic forest of symbols grounded on a complex Akan ethnohistorical backdrop, the actual living historical and cultural heritage of the Akans as opposed to an invented world. This stylistic manoeuvre, in which Armah exploits a multifaceted and complex figurative patterning in the three novels with postcolonial settings but adopts a style marked by self-conscious narrative simplicity devoid of metaphorical density and ambiguity in the two novelistic histories, particularly in *Two Thousand Seasons*, is probably a self-conscious creative design and not an accident of creative development. Owing to Armah's exploitation of the myth of the Magus – the Akan magical grove – which is ingeniously concealed by an overt surface simplicity, *The Healers* is more labyrinthine and more eclectic than *Why Are We So Blest?*.

In his *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (1990), Neil Lazarus comments on Armah's preoccupation with the same ideas – a critical formulation which re-affirms my hypothesis of the thematic wholeness of the five novels. Lazarus's assertion on Armah's rehearsal of themes in his fiction is extended to cover the essays, the stories and the poems. The critic declares that "For in numerous, if intermittent, articles, stories, and poems that he [Armah] has continued to publish in such journals and magazines as *Presence Africaine* and *West Africa* since 1978, there is little evidence of new ideas. His various recent writings all seem to tread the same paths as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* ..." (Lazarus, 1990: 233)<sup>1</sup>. My postulate that the novels form a single thematic structure, which Lazarus has eloquently confirmed, is also endorsed by Derek Wright. In his essay, "The Early Writings of Ayi Kwei Armah" (1978), which deals with Armah's stories, essays and poems, Wright records that "The germ of Armah's novels is represented in the themes of his early stories and essays ..." (Wright, 1978:487). Significantly, in his *Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa: The Sources of His Fiction* (1989), Wright repeats this critical formulation by contending that *Two Thousand Seasons* echoes "the underlying message" of the earlier novels and *The Healers* (Wright, 1978:141)<sup>2</sup>.

Another eclectic device Armah exploits in accentuating the unity of ideas in the five novels is the technique of naming characters in the novels. For instance the name, Maanan, appears as the

female character who is exploited both sexually and materially by Kwame Nkrumah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and finally abandoned by Nkrumah when Ghana achieved independence – an appalling and traumatic ill-treatment which drives Maanan insane. In *Two Thousand Seasons* Maanan re-surfaces as one of Isanusi's visionary initiates. Similarly, in *Why Are We So Blest?*, Naita, a sharp-witted African American, who becomes Modin first girlfriend and confidant in USA and to whom Modin's diary is addressed, re-appears as one of the visionary initiates in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Armah's eclectic manipulation of the creative ploy of character-naming is also evident in his use of the name "Araba". In *Fragments*, Armah names Baako's sister Araba – a character who is tormented by the evil cycle of *abiku*<sup>3</sup>. Armah re-exploits Araba in *The Healers* as Araba Jesiwa, Prince Appia's mother, and like her namesake in *Fragments*, Araba Jesiwa also suffers from *abiku*. Although Armah's version of the prophecy is different from that in Ama Ata Aidoo's dramatized in a play entitled *Anowa* (1970), both versions deal with the African leadership's relegation of the populace to life of servitude.

The analyses which deal with *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* go further back in time and are designed to comb the debris of Black racial history which conceals the seeds of Africa's enslavement and disfigurement. The purpose of these two novels is to lay bare how past evils begot present evils. *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* probe the root causes of Africa's denigration while *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* explore the subsequent cumulative effects of Africa's decay and fragmentation. The historiography exploited by Armah is analogous to what Hayden White's seminal work, *Metahistory* (1973), calls "the Contextualist" approach to history. White writes:

The Contextualist proceeds ... by isolating some ... element of the historical field as the subject of study ..... He then proceeds to pick out the "threads" that link the event to be explained to different areas of the context. The threads are identified and traced outward, into the circumambient natural and social space within which the event occurred, and both backward in time, in order to determine the "origins" of the event, and forward in time, in order to determine its "impact" and "influence" on subsequent events. (White, 1973:18)

What Armah has isolated "as the subject of study" is the origins of tyranny and slavery in Africa. In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah investigates the origins of servitude and despotism in Africa and links both to the institution of dynastic monarchy in Africa. He continues this fictional



investigation in *The Healers*, his postcolonial novel with precolonial settings, and arrives at the same conclusion: despotism and slavery are nourished by kingship rituals. In the novels with postcolonial settings, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* servitude/slave culture and dictatorship are again traced to the oppressive systems of government created by the ruling élite. But what Armah is concerned with in his three postcolonial works is the "impact" and the "influence" (the effects) of servitude and despotism on the postcolonial African states. Thus servitude and oppression created by the ruling class in Africa become the preoccupation of Armah's five novels. This is the thematic core which unifies Armah's novels and accounts for the rehearsal of themes. Some of the topics which have been rehearsed are the symbol of the old slave castle, ironic reversals, demonic images of decay and of scatology, pejorative and dystopian metaphors, and the brazen renegade attack against Africa's heroes. For in Armah's vision, there is little room for idolization of individual heroes (the Man, Baako, Modin, Solo, Isanusi-cum-the-initiates and the healers, who themselves abhor the isolation of the individual for exaltation, are never idealized by their creator); only the larger community is fit for glorification. One exception to the above schema needs to be pointed out. In *The Healers*, Armah does glorify individuals like Anan, Appia, Araba Jesiwa, Damfo and Densu. It could, however, be concluded that, in the two novelistic histories, Armah attempts to illuminate the current social problems and conflicts of postcolonial Africa by tracing the root causes of the unprecedented despotism and decay in modern Africa to their ancient origins. I argue, therefore, that the corpus is only fully revealed and rendered more meaningful when the five novels are treated as one artistic whole.

The central focus of this dissertation on Armah's five novels can be easily formulated: a dominant Eurocentric colonial image habitually presented Africa as the atavistic, barbaric, licentious "other" of Europe; a first generation of Black radical colonial and postcolonial writers, understandably, opposed this image with a Black counter-image which challenges the Eurocentric portrayals which malign traditional Africa and peoples of Black African descent by developing, instead, an African Golden Age. A casual survey of selected works of Black displaced ex-slaves living in Europe, ethnologists, historians, philosophers, politicians, literary critics and creative writers of Black Africa and the Diaspora reveals one major preoccupation: to give back to Black Africa its lost pride and dignity, to reassert the values of African cultures, and to re-interpret Africa's historical

landmarks and achievements. Although this grouping is not homogeneous it has one dominant preoccupation: to refute the European distortions of Black Africa. The advocates who lead this Afrocentric counter-image debate are W. E. B. Du Bois (1965), Cheikh Anta Diop (1960; 1974; 1985a; 1985b; 1987; 1989; 1991), Chancellor Williams (1971), Walter Rodney (1972), Ivan Van Sertima (1977; 1984, 1987), the editor of the *Journal of African Civilizations*, V. Y. Mudimbe (1985; 1988), and Y. Ben-Jochannann (1971, 1972). In turn a number of radical African creative writers, Ayi Kwei Armah included,<sup>4</sup> have not only resisted this mythopoesy and have shown that the “heroic” culture or “the fabulous past” was barbaric, feudal and anti-democratic and that the appeal of modern Africa rulers to this tradition has been in the sole interest of validating their own repressive regimes. Perhaps, I must add that Armah’s ambivalent position towards this “glorious past” needs to be stated. Despite Armah’s rejection of the “heroic culture”, he attempts simultaneously to recover the Golden Age via “The Way” and re-creates from the debris of his mutilated Akan world order in *The Healers* a re-integrated community.

## NOTES

1. In his *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), Neil Lazarus further restates the thematic rehearsal in Armah’s works as follows: “*Two Thousand Seasons* keeps faith with Armah’s three novels of postcolonialism by portraying the vast majority of the African population as in thrall to ‘alien’ ideologies ... *Two Thousand Seasons* does not, in short, differ from Armah’s novels of postcolonialism insofar as diagnosis of imperial hegemony is concerned. Nor does it underestimate the difficulties of challenging, still less of destroying, the established order” (Lazarus, 1990: 219-220).
2. Derek Wright’s assertion in his *Ayi Kwei Armah’s Africa: The Sources of His Fiction* (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1989) appears to prove beyond all doubts the interpretation that Armah’s five novels’ rehearse the same creative concerns, when he asserts the thematic motif of the African rulers’ exploitation of the ruled “has resurfaced, with a monotonous predictability, in everything Armah has written since” (Wright, 1989: 242).
3. *Abiku* (Yoruba)/*Ogbanje* (Igbo)/*Dzikuidzikui* (Ewe) are traditional African motifs which have the same meaning. In Gerard M. Dalglish’s *A Dictionary of Africanisms* (1982), *abiku* is defined as “an evil spirit of the Yoruba who inhabits the body of a child. The child soon dies and the spirit re-enters the mother’s womb, to be born and die again”. *Ogbanje* is described in Chinua Achebe’s “A Glossary of Ibo Words and Phrases” to *Things Fall Apart* as “a changeling: a child who repeatedly dies and returns to its mother to be reborn. It is almost impossible to bring up an *ogbanje* child without it dying unless its *iyi-uwa* is first found and destroyed” (Achebe, 1958:150). *Dzikuidzikui* evokes the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth through a linguistic coupling of the root words *dzi* (to give birth) and *ku* (to die). Thus *dzikuidzikui* literally means “born-dead-to-born-dead”.

4. Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1925), Sol T. Plaatje's *Mhudi* (1930), Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of Forests* (1963) and Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound To Violence* (1968) seriously challenge the thesis which presents pre-colonial Africa as "a Golden Age" just as Ayi Kwei Armah has done in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1978).

## Chapter Two

### The Historical Backdrop of Armah's Novels with Postcolonial Settings

My text was, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth" and reminded the people of how history repeated itself. Just as in the days of the Egyptians, so today God had ordained that certain among the African race should journey westwards to equip themselves with knowledge and experience for the day when they would be called upon to return to their motherland and to use the learning they had acquired to help improve the lot of their brethren .... I had not realized at the time that I would contribute so much towards the fulfilment of this prophecy.

Kwame Nkrumah, 1957.<sup>1</sup>

The central preoccupation of this chapter is to sketch the documented political history which forms the backdrop of Armah's three novels with postcolonial settings. Since Kwame Nkrumah's political career is isolated for vilification by Armah in his postcolonial novels, this chapter will concentrate on the comparative analysis of Ayi Kwei Armah's fictional history of the Nkrumah era with the actual political portrait of Nkrumah, which stretched from 1945 to 1966. Nkrumah's legendary image – historic rise to fame and power and his emergence as the pillar of African nationalism and Pan-Africanism – was deflated on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1966 in a military coup d'etat. But Nkrumah's shattered image was resurrected when commissions of inquiries into allegations of his embezzlement of millions of US dollars proved that the accusations were mere fabrications. Thus, his mortal remains were exhumed from their humble grave in his aboriginal village of Nkroful in Nzima, flown to Accra by the Rawlings government, and given a national hero's burial. This view is elucidated by Baffour Ankomah and Mike Afrani as follows: The Rawlings government "built an impressive mausoleum for Nkrumah in the heart of Accra six years go on the spot where Nkrumah declared independence in 1957. The government then moved Nkrumah's remains from his home town of Nkroful in the Western Region into the new mausoleum where the embalmed body now lives." Thus, "Nkrumah had the last the laugh," Ankomah and Afrani conclude. "He became Ghana's number one hero again – the cycle turning full circle for him: Nkrumah the hero became Nkrumah the villain after his overthrow, and now he is back at No. 1



as Nkrumah the hero” (Ankomah & Afrani, 1997:11).

Although Kwame Nkrumah’s mother, Nyaniba, believed that he was born in 1912, the Roman Catholic priest who baptised him put the date at September 21, 1909. Nkrumah’s father was a goldsmith and his mother was a petty-trader. Notwithstanding the fact that his parents were illiterates themselves, they ensured that Nkrumah received an education. Young Nkrumah started his formal education in the Half Assini Roman Catholic Primary School in 1914. In 1926 and at the age of seventeen Nkrumah completed his primary school education but the school retained him as a pupil teacher. Nkrumah was such an excellent teacher that he was spotted by the principal of the prestigious Achimota College, Rev A. G. Fraser, who visited the school and recommended Nkrumah for admission into Achimota College to train as a teacher. In his *Nkrumah and Ghana: The Dilemma of Post-Colonial Power* (1988), Kofi Buenor Hadjor comments on Nkrumah’s admission into Achimota College and refers to the event as “a stroke of good fortune which placed him [Nkrumah] among the most privileged youth of his time” (Hadjor, 1988:29). Nkrumah enjoyed the academic atmosphere and the posh surroundings of Achimota, which boasted of senior teachers who had Oxbridge degrees. One of the teachers who had profound influence on Nkrumah and taught him African studies was the Vice-Principal, Dr Kwegyir Aggrey. It was Dr Aggrey, who helped him make sense of the changing face of Ghana and Africa. Nkrumah describes Dr Aggrey in his autobiography as follows:

To me Aggrey seemed the most remarkable man I had ever met and I had the deepest affection for him. He possessed intense vitality and enthusiasm and a most infectious laugh that seemed to bubble up from his heart, and he was a great orator. It was through him that my nationalism was first aroused. He was extremely proud of his color, but he was opposed to racial segregation of any form. (Nkrumah, 1957:12)

The tragedy of this relationship between Nkrumah and Aggrey was that it was terminated prematurely when Aggrey died while on holiday in the USA. Hadjor relates Nkrumah’s reaction to this tragic news: “Deeply upset by the loss of a man who was a dear friend and mentor, Nkrumah vowed to uphold the spirit of Aggrey – both by forcefully arguing for the man’s principles and by resolving to further his education to enable him to put those principles into action” (Hadjor, 1988:30). The four years he spent in Achimota was clearly a watershed in his

journey of life. In 1930 he graduated from Achimota and was appointed a primary school teacher at the Roman Catholic Primary School at Elmina. Within a year, he was promoted a head teacher at the Roman Catholic Junior School at Axim. Nkrumah's next teaching appointment took him to the Roman Catholic Seminary at Amissano near Elmina, where he acquired a religious attribute. While at the seminary, Nkrumah's nationalism was nourished and kept alive by writers and political activists like Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose newspaper the *African Morning Post* kept the flame of African nationalism burning.

When Kwame Nkrumah left Ghana for the United States in 1935 with a view to furthering his education, he was known as Francis Nwia-Kofi Nkrumah. The first leg of Nkrumah's voyage to the USA took him to England where he obtained a US visa and finally boarded a Cunard White Star liner to New York. Nkrumah did not only arrived in the USA penniless but was also two months late for the start of the term. What was worse he did not have a definite place at Lincoln University to which he had applied in a letter dated 1 March 1935. Nkrumah made a good impression on the Dean of Lincoln University, who admitted him on the condition that he performed well in the first year examinations. Though Nkrumah did so well I was given a scholarship, financial problems dogged his life and he was forced to do all kinds of menial part-time jobs in order to survive.

Nkrumah studied in America, where he acquired a BSc in Economics and Sociology (1939) from the Lincoln University. He had a BA degree in Sacred Theology (1942) from the Seminary at Lincoln, an MSc in Education (1942), and an MA in Philosophy (1943), both from the University of Pennsylvania. Nkrumah also registered for a doctoral degree in Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania – “a PhD for which he passed all the requirements in 1945 except the dissertation” (Ankomah & Afrani, 1997:13). He did not complete his PhD programme on logical positivism because of financial difficulties (George B. N. Ayittey, 1992:160).

Nkrumah taught African American History at the University of Philadelphia. Although Nkrumah enjoyed this short spell of teaching at the university, he was deeply disappointed by the fact that the focus of the history programme was the Black community in America and no attempt was made to link the programme to tracing this community back to Africa. To rectify this deficiency

in the history curriculum, Nkrumah set up an African Studies Group. He also formed the African Students Association of America and Canada with two Ghanaian students, Ako Adjei (who became a cabinet minister in the Nkrumah government) and Jones Quartey. Nkrumah and his two friends also established a newspaper entitled *African Interpreter* in 1940. By taking part in political activities of the Republicans, the Democrats, the Communists and the Trotskyites, Nkrumah learnt political organizational methods. This association organised debates on subjects and issues dealing with African Studies. Commenting on the association and its activities Hadjor writes: "This signalled Nkrumah's entry into politics in America: the association published a journal called the *African Interpreter*, which attempted, according to Nkrumah, to 'revive a spirit of nationalism'" (Hadjor, 1988:36). This participation in student politics equipped Nkrumah with organizational experience, which became very useful during the era of decolonization in Ghana.

Nkrumah left America in May 1945 for London with the purpose of completing his PhD and acquiring an additional degree in Law. When Nkrumah registered at the Gray's Inn, he changed his name from Francis Nwia-Kofi Nkrumah to Kwame Nkrumah (Ankomah & Afrani, 1997:13). Nkrumah did not finish these degrees because of two major reasons. Firstly, his friends, George Padmore and Ras T. Mokonnen made him to realise that he had had enough of formal education. Secondly, Nkrumah "was brought into the thick of the preparations for the Fifth Pan-Africanist Congress to be held in Manchester" (Hadjor, 1988:38-39) in October 1945. Together with George Padmore, Ras T. Makonnen, and Peter Abrahams he organized the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945. For Nkrumah this congress was unique and marked the turning point of the Pan-African Movement. He was able to attract a great number of African politicians who later became leaders of various African countries in their struggle against colonialism (Agyeman, 1993:153). Nkrumah also played an active role in the West African Students Union (WASU) and was the founding member of the West African National Secretariat (WANS). Like in America, he and his friends established a newspaper, *New Africa*, in March 1946 (Ankomah and Afrani, 1997:14).

Not unlike in American where Nkrumah gained practical experience by participating in students politics Nkrumah's practical training was further enriched when he was in London. His "two years in London were consumed by learning the practical side of organising mass political movements.



His friend, George Padmore, was his teacher.” (Ankomah and Afrani, 1997:14). Nkrumah took part in political activities organised by the Labour Party and the British Communist Party. As Agyeman rightly puts it, “It is indeed this rich, practical political training which gave him the edge over his opponents, both Africans and whites ” (Agyeman, 1993:153).

Thus, Nkrumah spent two years in London learning how to organise mass political movements, a practical political experience which he put into brilliant use on his return to Ghana in 1947. In the same year Dr J. B. Danquah, the founder of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), invited Nkrumah to come home and become the General Secretary of the party. Hadjor demystifies Nkrumah’s rise to power in his work. He asserts that “Nkrumah’s success was based on his ability to bring workers and peasants into active political life ... However, the old leadership of the UGCC felt ill at ease with mass politics. As successful lawyers and businessmen, they had acquired the habits and tastes of their colonial masters and looked upon the ordinary people with a degree of contempt” (Hadjor, 1988:46-47). This political relationship between Nkrumah and members of the UGCC, who were mostly lawyers failed because the conservative constitutional approach to politics, which UGCC lawyers adopted ran counter to Nkrumah’s Marxist radicalism. The conflict in political ideology is expressed by the irreconcilable political agenda of Nkrumah and the leadership of the UGCC. While the UGCC lawyers wanted “self-government in the shortest time possible” Nkrumah advocated “Self-government now.” The middle class elite of lawyers whom Nkrumah labelled “Black Englishmen” in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* not only collaborated with the British administration in the Gold Coast, but also wanted the colonial government to grant them independence when it was convenient for the British colonizers. What was worse, they were unwilling to seize power by mounting political pressure on the imperialist powers. But Nkrumah, on the other hand, wanted the British colonizers to leave the Gold Coast.

Nkrumah’s humble origins contrasted sharply with the opulent background and haughty temperament of the UGCC lawyers. But Nkrumah’s modest personality trait disappeared once he won independence and became the Head of State in 6 March, 1957. Ayittey confirms the personality differences between Nkrumah “the Verandah Boy” and Nkrumah “the Show Boy” (the President). “His background was that of a man of modest upbringing, which starkly contrasted



with his subsequent performance as head of state” (Ayittey, 1992:159-160). This ideological clash between Nkrumah and the UGCC leadership led to Nkrumah’s resignation and formation of his own political party, Convention People’s Party (CPP) on 12 June, 1949.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* Armah portrays in great details how Nkrumah’s charismatic political leadership style accounts for the overwhelming support the masses give him and how he has outclassed the intelligentsia of lawyers and merchants, the Black Englishmen who also vied for the people’s support. Armah’s fictional depiction of the euphoria triggered by Nkrumah’s political rallies is confirmed by the political history of the decolonizing era in Ghana. One of the major factors which contributed to Nkrumah and the CPP’s victory at the polls during the crucial 1951 election and subsequent election victories in 1954, 1956 and 1957 was that Nkrumah had a practical political training – an organizational skill, which the leadership of the UGCC lacked. When Nkrumah joined the UGCC as the Secretary General, he suggested the establishment of a newspaper for the political education of the masses, but his suggestion was not approved by the Executive Committee of the UGCC. Nkrumah saw it necessary to use the newspaper for educating and mobilizing the masses because his practical political training in both America and England had taught him the indispensable effectiveness of the newspaper as a tool in mass political movements. Besides the above, the newspaper was the only mass medium accessible to him since radio stations were completely controlled by the colonial government. Looking back, Nkrumah wrote in his *Ghana: Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (1957) that “Personally, I failed to see how any liberation movement could possibly succeed without an effective means of broadcasting its policy to the rank and file of the people” (Nkrumah, 1957:76). Thus, when Nkrumah broke away from the UGCC and founded his own party, the CPP, he established a newspaper, *The Accra Evening News*. This sensibility is conveyed by George P. Hagan’s essay entitled “Nkrumah’s Leadership Style” (1993), in which he writes: “On the very day on which he ceased to be the General Secretary of the UGCC, the first issue of his paper, *The Accra Evening News*, appeared. ... (Hagan, 1993: 181). In retrospect, Nkrumah wrote: ‘I knew that sooner or later a final split would have to come. I was determined, therefore, to organize things in such a way that when this break came I would have the full support of the masses behind me’” (Nkrumah, 1957: 79).

When the eventual break took place, so effective had been Nkrumah's campaign in organising the youth that in the end everything appeared, and it was made to look as if it was the youth who had chosen Nkrumah as a leader and forced him to leave the UGCC (Hagan, 1993:180-181). Nkrumah realized that it was not only the intelligentsia who hated the chiefs but also the entire Committee for the Youth Organization of the UGCC (which Nkrumah hijacked when he broke away) detested the royal autocrats who traditionally supported the colonial government against the nationalist liberation movements. Kwame Arhin conveys this view in his essay, "The Search for 'Constitutional Chieftaincy'" (1993):

The rank and file of the Committee for Youth Organization, which in 12 June 1949 broke away from the UGCC and formed the Convention People's Party, consisted of youth associations, clubs and societies of elementary school leavers<sup>2</sup> who were even more resentful than the intelligentsia of the growing chiefly authority,<sup>3</sup> particularly as manifested in the operations of the Native Authority Courts, and led the destoolment movements against the chiefs. (Arhin, 1993:31)

When the 1951 crucial elections approached, the political climate in the Gold Coast reached a fever pitch. The chiefs and the intelligentsia "regarded Nkrumah and his party as *pavenus*, and potential usurper of power from the legitimate heirs to the British, the chiefs and the British-educated 'intelligentsia'" (Arhin, 1993:31). The hostility between the CPP and the chiefs was magnified to an unprecedented height when the latter declared open support for the colonial government in 1950 after Nkrumah had launched his "Positive Action" (Civil Disobedience, Non-Cooperation and Nation-Wide Strikes) in order to advance his struggle for independence.

Now that the chiefs had emerged as the most powerful reactionary force determined to forestall the just aspirations of the masses, Nkrumah issued a strong warning to them. He declared that if the chiefs persisted in their obstructive course of action, their current influential position in the society would be annihilated. He declared that: "The chiefs would run away and leave their sandals behind."<sup>4</sup> The significance and implications of Nkrumah's warning is described by George P. Hagan in his essay, "Nkrumah's Cultural Policy." Hagan explains that "For a chief to step on the ground with his bare feet was a sign of abdication or self-destoolment. A destooled chief has his sandals seized from under his feet. And therefore Nkrumah's words meant nothing but that chiefs would lose their prominent position in the society, even if chiefship would survive in any

form” (Hagan, 1993:10) and this was precisely what happened after independence.

To mobilize, and win the support of the educated minority in the Gold Coast, Nkrumah exploited the press. P. A. V. Ansah reveals Nkrumah’s definition and effective exploitation role the newspaper plays in mass political movements. We are told that “Nkrumah described *The Accra Evening News* which appeared on 3 September 1948, with one sheet as (Ansah, 1993: 85) ‘the vanguard of the movement and its chief propagandist, agitator, mobilizer and political educationist’” (Nkrumah, 1957: 76). *The Accra Evening News* carried Nkrumah’s clarion call: “We prefer self-government with danger to servitude with tranquillity.” This newspaper was not the only propaganda mouthpiece of the CPP. In January 1949 Nkrumah established the *Morning Telegraph* in Sekondi-Takoradi and appointed Kwame Afriyie as editor and in December 1949 he also set up the *Daily Mail* in Cape Coast with Kofi Baako as editor (Ansah, 1993:84-85).

According to Hagan “the papers lived dangerously, their editors often being carried to court for libel and sedition. As the papers gained notoriety through court cases, their circulation increased” (Hagan, 1993:183). The monumental accomplishment of these newspapers in launching and maintaining “Positive Action” is revealed by the reaction of the colonial government. When the British administration’s appeal to the masses on the radio to go back to work failed, because Nkrumah’s newspapers had succeeded in awakening the nationalist feelings of the masses, leading to massive strikes and boycotts, the colonizers closed down all the three newspapers. The colonial government charged the editors of *The Accra Evening News* and the Cape Coast *Daily Mail* with sedition and the editor of the *Morning Telegraph* was jailed for contempt of Court (Nkrumah, 1957:98). Nkrumah used the libel and sedition court cases to indicate he was fearless and that the fight through the pen did not need less courage than was required to face physical violence. Equally interesting is the fact that going to prison for political reasons became a vehicle for martyrdom – a badge of national honour. Hagan conveys this view lucidly when he writes that “Those who had suffered persecution for the party’s sake had the symbol of martyrdom. They wore white caps with the sign ‘PG’ written on it. The Prison Graduate (PG) cap was proudly worn by the few, including Nkrumah himself. Going to prison became as nothing to the members of the CPP” (Hagan, 1993:185).



Nkrumah summed up the effectiveness and indispensability of the newspaper as the tool in organizing and mobilizing the masses. Thus, in the 14 January, 1949 issue of *The Accra Evening News*, Nkrumah wrote: "The strength of the organized masses is invincible ... We must organize as never before, the organization decides everything." Nkrumah's concept of the newspaper as a revolutionary tool must have been influenced by his reading of V.I. Lenin's *What Must Be Done* (1901-2, 1965). What Nkrumah said during his address to the Second Conference of African Journalists in Accra, 1963, which appeared in his *Africa Must Unite* (1963) echo closely the speech of Lenin in 1901-2. Nkrumah asserted that to "the true African journalist, his newspaper is a collective organizer, a collective instrument of mobilization and a collective educator – a weapon, first and foremost, to overthrow colonialism and imperialism and to assist total African independence and unity" (Nkrumah, 1963:5). The Leninist view of the indispensable revolutionary tool of the newspapers runs as follows: "A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and collective agitator, but also a collective organizer. In this respect [the newspaper] can be compared to the scaffolding erected around a building in construction; it marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, permitting them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by the organized labour" (Lenin, 1901-2, 1965: 202).

By eclectically exploiting the three newspapers he had established in the three regions of Ghana, Nkrumah succeeded in eclipsing the power base of his UGCC opponents. This was not all. In order to destroy the support base of the UGCC, Nkrumah for the first time introduced the notion of class as a political weapon into Ghana politics. He initiated a careful indoctrination of his followers. He achieved this brainwashing of the Ghanaian masses by describing the leaders of the UGCC as the elitist bourgeois propertied class, who were motivated by their selfish interest and had no desire to empower the masses. Hagan describes this perception brilliantly. He writes:

Up till that break, the ordinary people of the Gold Coast had not seen their leaders as a class apart. If they did, they did not see this as a cause for war– a class war. Now Nkrumah described the leaders of the UGCC as the bourgeois, privileged, professional group, and began to cast them in the role of the enemy within. From that point, the Gold Coast society became class conscious, and this consciousness became sharper as time went by, and has persisted till this day. (Hagan, 1993:181).



This is, perhaps, the most powerful political manoeuvre Nkrumah initiated – a strategy which destroyed the UGCC political support base. Another factor accounts for Nkrumah's phenomenal rise to power. Nkrumah outclassed the leaders of the UGCC because of his adept deployment of the tools of mass communication in the political culture of the Gold Coast.

One of the great talents of Nkrumah as a politician, which played a dominant role in his sweeping the polls during elections, particularly the four (1951, 1954, 1956 and 1957) pre-independence elections, was his ability to communicate effectively not only his ideas but also his feelings. According to Hagan (1993:182), "his greatest gift in this regard was his ability to give the people simple slogans and phrases which facilitated the spread of his message and gave their peddlers a sense of a new awareness and importance." Nkrumah's tools of communication worked so well that his party, the CPP, had little difficulty in becoming political heirs to the power formerly exercised by the colonial government and their junior partners, the chiefs. Nkrumah did not make the political blunders committed by the leaders of the UGCC, who targeted only the educated minority of the urban centres. He mobilized both the educated and semi-educated minority who lived in the urban areas and the majority of the illiterate masses who lived in the rural areas. In the rural masses Nkrumah adopted the direct face-to-face approach. Nkrumah was forced to see and touch the people, and vice versa.

To win the support and the admiration of the rural illiterate masses, whom he could not reach through the newspaper, Nkrumah communicated with his body. In the decolonizing years he permitted people to touch him. Nkrumah accentuated this political body-language communication by shaking hands with everyone and having a word to say to each person. The humble rural persons he met, shook hands with, and talked to, went away with a obvious pleasure, and never stopped saying to everyone they saw that they had met and shaken hand with Nkrumah. Hagan explicates this political campaigning as follows: "He had to see and touch the people, and the people had to see and touch him. His body and his voice became the medium of communication – and that medium became identified with the call to arms and with *independence*" (Hagan, 1993:182). Through this strategy Nkrumah won their friendship and long lasting admiration. In *The Beautiful Ones* Teacher comments on how the disenfranchised masses love Nkrumah for mixing freely them.

This unique political stratagem is clarified by Nkrumah in his *Africa Must Unite* (1963a). Recording his visit to Kumasi in May 1948, Nkrumah stated that he was given a “tremendous welcome”. “A crowd gathered at the station to meet my train and as I stepped from the compartment a burst of cheering greeted me. I was swept off my feet and carried shoulder high to the waiting taxi ... The cheers of the crowd made me very happy” (Nkrumah, 1963:9). Nkrumah’s name became a household word because his campaigns took him to every corner of the Gold Coast and he spoke to all manner of gathering. He had become the symbol of independence and loved to meet the masses and he was obsessed with drawing the crowds, who loved to hear him talk to them. The mammoth crowds he attracted were proof of his strength and popular support. Hadjor reveals how Nkrumah’s travelling through the breadth of the country plays an important role in his rise to power. Through his travels Nkrumah had learned what the people wanted and he had become “the People’s Tribune – a leader who is able to articulate clearly what until then had remained the subject of incoherent conversation in the towns and villages. It was for this reason that people attending Nkrumah’s rallies so readily recognized themselves as at one with the speaker” (Hadjor, 1988:45).

Another political innovation Nkrumah introduced into the political culture of the Gold Coast was the use of propaganda vans and loudspeakers. In order to give speed to his agents in the field of canvassing, Nkrumah introduced propaganda vans which had loudspeakers mounted on them. These were painted in party colours and symbol. Thus, the ancient tradition of a gong-gong beater who went round to communicate the chief’s laws and wishes gave way to modern vans equipped with loudspeakers. The vans performed the same duty like the gong-gong beater, communicating CPP’s programme to the people, but with greater power and mobility and with music too. The phenomenal success of the CPP vans is conveyed by Hagan, who asserts that “the vans brought the news of Ghana’s independence struggle directly to the ears of everyone ... From being an urban based party, the CPP spread like wild fire and found its greatest support in the rural areas where apart from confrontations with chiefs, it had no challenge” (Hagan, 1993:187).

The other gift of Nkrumah was that he had the knack to identify the personal endowments of individuals and to use them when the need arose. Thus, each member of the motley crowd that followed him was aware that they had a special role, and that their talent was recognized and

needed by Nkrumah. Nkrumah recognized the qualities of men and women, even when these talents were enshrouded by character traits. Closely related to this is the fact that Nkrumah was able to mix characters of different backgrounds, and often succeeded in creating a team in which each fitted into his political arrangement. Nkrumah's gift had adverse side as pointed out by Hagan: "Having created such a team, however, he found it difficult to alter its composition even when this became an obvious necessity" (Hagan, 1993:190). Worse still he treated those who left the team as traitors – a tendency which was a major weakness. His team was composed of people of great experience and those of little or no experience. Nkrumah's team included highly educated people, and people with little education. Hagan wrote that Nkrumah "had traditional believers, Muslims, Christians of various denominations, and professed atheists and priests. He had wealthy men and women and very poor people. He put them together into one family" (Hagan, 1993:190).

As a populist, Nkrumah relied on the lower classes to build his party. The notion that the disinherited masses constituted the source of political power was a totally new idea in the Gold Coast. Before the rise of Nkrumah into the political arena, the middle class elite had had discussion groups as their exclusive forum which was inaccessible to the rural majority. The broadest popular movement ever created was the Rate Payers Association, which more or less limited the franchise to a property owning or tax paying class – an undemocratic system which excluded the bulk of the people from direct participation in the political process of the day. Hagan explains how Nkrumah reversed the undemocratic and sexist culture of the colonial Gold Coast (Hagan, 1993:191):

Nkrumah turned the power structure on its head. He asserted that power was not with the chief, power was not with the educated elite – certainly. But not exclusively; power was not with rate payers; power was with the masses. If the term "the masses" had ever been used to refer to any section of the Gold Coast society, Nkrumah now gave it a new significance. It referred to the workers and the people – so long as it did not belong to the book people; the bourgeoisie, the mercantile and professional groups. But this was not all.

Nkrumah took the women – even illiterate ones – abroad to see the world. They flew their flag side by side with the national flag ... The younger ones he advanced in the party and government. Nkrumah gave Ghana not only its first woman tractor driver, the first woman police and soldier, but the first woman District Commissioner, High Court Judge and the first woman Minister of State.



This innovative and humane political leadership style accounted for the masses's unconditional and whole-hearted support for Nkrumah and the CPP. In *The Beautiful Ones* Armah alludes to this notion of the masses being the source of political power when he puts these words into Nkrumah's mouth: "We have power. But we will never know it; we will never see it work. Unless we choose to come together to make it work. Let us come together" (p.87). As Armah has brilliantly portrayed in *The Beautiful Ones*, the humane and rural-oriented campaign of Nkrumah moves the hearts of all Ghanaians, both young and old. Everyone believes that at last something beautiful is being born and the euphoria of freedom infects the entire nation. But this great dream, according to Armah, is quickly perverted when Nkrumah and his party henchmen put their selfish interests above those of the nation. Using the Teacher as the focalizer, Armah poses the question: "How could this have grown rotten with such obscene haste?" (p. 88). Nkrumah's massive alienation from the masses and transformation of political leadership when he became President were triggered by a number of factors. The first of these are security measures put in place after independence to protect the Head of State. The other was his heavy involvement with continental affairs of Africa – measures which made it impossible for Nkrumah to mix freely with the masses as he did during the decolonizing years. The growing bridge between Nkrumah and the masses was inevitable. This was because his status and role in the nation had changed. The change occurred as much in Nkrumah's own perception of himself as in his supporters' perception of him. As Hagan has rightly put it: "Not only had Nkrumah risen in status, he had, through that rise, also distanced himself from the rank and file of the people. And this distance became bigger as his leadership acquired and added international dimension" (Hagan, 1993:194). Nkrumah's commitment towards the liberation of the African continent was powerfully invoked by his famous declaration on independence day – "the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked with the total liberation of Africa."

Armah's castigation of Nkrumah for moving into the Christianborg (Slave) Castle after declaring Ghana a republic and making the castle the residence of the Head of State, is definitely a political and ideological blunder. By his occupation of the slave castle, which currently is the official residence of Ghanaian Heads of State, Nkrumah created the impression that the servitude which the castle symbolizes is re-enacted after the sons of the soil seized political power and were in control of the affairs of the ex-colony. One postcolonial political and ideological blunder which



Nkrumah committed – a faux pas which drew widespread criticism from both Africa and abroad was Nkrumah's moving into the Christianborg (Slave) Castle after declaring Ghana a republic and making the castle the residence of the Head of State.

My concern here is to compare Armah's portraiture of African leaders in *The Beautiful Ones* and *Why Are We So Blest?* with the political portrait of Nkrumah. Armah's fictional representation asserts that "The main political characteristic of African leadership since the European invasion is its inability and unwillingness to connect organically with the African people because it always wants first of all to connect with Europe and Europeans" (p. 221). It is crucial to observe that African leaders' obsession with European ethos is inaugurated in the first novel and further elaborated in *Two Thousand Seasons* when King Koranche deliberately goes to Poano to invite Europeans to come to Anoa and crowns his desire to establish a relationship with the European invaders with sending his son, Prince Bentum, to be trained as a servant to serve the Europeans in the slave castle, instead of joining his age mates who are undergoing traditional initiation ceremonies in the sacred grove. This thematic concern is initiated in *The Beautiful Ones* when the narrator indicts Nkrumah for installing himself in the slave Christianborg Castle after independence in his attempt to mimic the British Governor. The narrator tells us that "After a youth spent fighting the white man, why should not the president discover as he grows older that his real desire has been to be like the white governor himself, to live above all blackness in the big old slave castle? ... That is all anyone here ever struggles for: to be nearer the white man. All the shouting against the white men was not hate. It was love. Twisted, but love all the same" (p. 92).

Also crucial to this political analysis is Nkrumah's attitude to the cultural development of Ghana and Africa. Nkrumah's anti-traditional cultural policy during the era of decolonization was determined largely by the chiefs' allegiance to the colonial government of the Gold Coast. Nkrumah was constantly harassed by the reactionary tactics of the chiefs, who openly declared their support for the British colonial administration in 1950 when Nkrumah launched his Positive Action. He reacted by setting CPP youth activists and destoolment agitators against them. Nkrumah not only educated the youth to see the chiefs as reactionaries, who obstructed the just democratic and freedom aspirations of the masses but also used the youths as destoolment agitators who brought destoolment charges against anti-CPP chiefs and had them removed from

power. The aftermath of this political strategy was that the youth lost the traditional respect normally accorded the chiefs, the fountainheads of Africa's cultural treasures. These activities led to erosion of cultural values. After independence, Nkrumah saw the adverse effects of this political strategy and tried to rectify the problem by establishing the Young Pioneers. In his speech entitled *Revive Our Virtues* (1963c) in which he outlined the objectives of the youth movement, Nkrumah declared that his aim was to revive "those virtues and values in our society on which our fathers based their high standards of moral conduct and behaviour." Nkrumah asserted that the main purpose of the youth movement was "to inculcate in our young people and our youth the virtues and disciplines such as the spirit of service, love for work, a sense of responsibility and dedication, of devotion to Ghana and Africa, of *respect for superiors* [which was subverted when he set the youth against the chiefs] and self-discipline and earnestness" (Nkrumah, 1963c).

In spite of his destructive role towards the cultural heritage of Ghana during the decolonizing years, Nkrumah tirelessly built all cultural institutions found in Ghana today. "Among the most outstanding of these are the Ghana Museum, which was opened on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 1957 – the eve of Independence; the Arts Council of Ghana, which was created as the Cultural wing of the Ministry of Education and Culture (1958); the Research Library on African Affairs (June, 1961); and the Ghana Film Corporation" [which Armah renames Ghanavision in *Fragments*] (Hagan, 1993:3). In his *I Speak of Freedom* (1961b), Nkrumah projects a cultural vision which Armah echoes in his *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* – a view which laments Africa's cultural disorientation and derailment. Nkrumah wrote (Nkrumah, 1961b:48):

Our pattern of education has been aligned hitherto to the demands of British examination councils. Above all, it was formulated and administered by an alien administration desirous of extending its dominant ideas and thought processes to us. We were trained to be inferior copies of Englishmen, caricatures to be laughed at with our pretensions to British bourgeois gentility, our grammatical faultiness and distorted standards betraying us at every turn. We were neither fish nor fowl. We were denied the knowledge of our African past and informed that we had no present. What future could there be for us? We were taught to regard our culture and traditions as barbarous and primitive. Our textbooks, tell us about English history, English geography, English ways of living, English customs, English ideas, English weather. Many of these manuals had not been altered since 1895.

Nkrumah saw education as a powerful tool for the cultural development of Ghana and African

personality. In spite of the many policy statements Nkrumah made on Ghana's cultural development, no well-defined cultural policy was drawn until 1963 when Nkrumah established the Institute of African Studies at University of Ghana. Nkrumah's difficulty in spelling out concrete cultural policy for Ghana stemmed from the dilemma culture posed for Nkrumah. Nkrumah learnt during the era of decolonization that traditional culture had two tendencies which militate against African progress. It not only carried within itself forces of resistance but it also bore the seeds of disunity which threatened to fragment colonial Ghana into ethnic entities. On the other hand, Nkrumah was aware of the masses' consciousness of how their distinct heritage had constituted one of the major bulwarks against colonialism and imperialism. According to Hagan:

In the heat of the nationalist struggle, however, the incipient negative forces of that same heritage became apparent. What most engaged Nkrumah's mind at the time was not only the people's obsession with *aborofosem*, European ways and European values of the elite, but the divisiveness of the tribal cultures and the reactionary leadership of the chiefs to whom the people owed traditional allegiance. He made all these the object of persistent attack. But he directed his most threatening remarks against chiefs whom he saw as a direct threat to the revolution. Nkrumah's enigma in respect of the cultural policy had its seeds in his reaction to chieftaincy, tribalism and *aborofosem*. (Hagan, 1993:10)

But Nkrumah's attacks on the chiefs bore fruit. By the time of independence most chiefs had either willingly or under the fear of Nkrumah's threat, reluctantly pledged him their allegiance. Thereafter, Nkrumah no longer appeared as the usurper of powers of the chiefs but as a leader accepted within the framework of traditional values. Nkrumah "naturally accepted the accolade *Osagyefo* and subsequently accepted to be enstooled in his home village [Nkroful] in the Nzima area. The expression 'the chiefs and people of Ghana' became one of the favorite expressions of Nkrumah" (Hagan, 1993:11).

It is no surprise, therefore, that Nkrumah surrounded his presidency with the symbols of chiefly status. For example, he ensured that his presidential stool, like the Golden Stool, was made of gold and designed in traditional motif. Kente, the traditional gear for the Asantehene, became his costume on formal occasions, although he appeared at times uncomfortable in it. According to Hagan, "It was reliably learnt that at least initially his kente was held in place with safety pins"

(Hagan, 1993:12). Hagan details the kingship symbols of rituals and status which surrounded Nkrumah's presidency as "a state umbrella occasionally appeared over him; and traditional drummers and horn-blowers became part of formal state ceremonies. Nkrumah had a linguist to pour libation and praise him with traditional praise names from all the major chiefdoms of Ghana" (Hagan, 1993:11). In his work entitled *The New Leaders of Africa* (1961), Rolf Italiaander lists the multifarious praise appellations of Nkrumah as follows: "Today his [Nkrumah's] full name is President *Osagyefo* (Great Man, Who Assembles the Army) *Kukudurini* (Man of Courage, Unfrightened, Brave) *Kantamanto* (Man Whose Words Are Irrevocable, And Who Protects the People) *Kasapieko* (Man of Final Words, Who Says Things Only Once) *Oyeadieyie* (Man of Action, Who Does Things Right) *Nufeno* (Strongest of All, Who Surpasses Everybody) Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Liberator and Founder of Ghana" (Italiaander, 1961:227). These myriad and bombastic praise appellations are virulently caricatured by Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* when Kamuzu functions as Nkrumah's parody. Nkrumah's dilemma was crystal clear: that although he adored chieftaincy as the embodiment of Ghanaian culture, he hated it as a reactionary force whose power had to be reduced.

The climax of Nkrumah's cultural policy was reached in 1963 when he delivered a speech entitled *The African Genius* during the opening of The Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, which became the fountainhead of Ghana's cultural development. On this occasion Nkrumah laid out a detailed cultural policy for Ghana and Africa and made the Institute of African Studies the cultural model for other institutions. Hagan illuminates the objectives of the Institute of African Studies as follows:

First, he identified the polarity of the African past and Africa's future, and from the perspectives of the present, insisted that we must re-assess and assert the glories and achievements of our African past, and inspire our generation and succeeding generations with a vision of a better future. The future of Africa could not be compromised by cultural atavism, and the past could not be denigrated and rejected by any radical commitment to progress and change which would kill the people's sense of historical identity. (Hagan, 1993:19)

The quotation not only challenges Nkrumah's radical cultural atavism explored in Armah's novels but also eloquently endorses Nkrumah's devotion to Ghana's cultural heritage. The Institute of



African Studies was charged with the burden of leading the effort to uncover Africa's heritage and make the African aware of this rich heritage. Nkrumah insisted that the studies undertaken on African peoples and cultures must not be confined to "conventional territorial regional boundaries" (Nkrumah, 1963e:9). He asserted that "these investigation must inevitably lead outwards – to the exploration on the connections between the music forms, the dances, the literature, the plastic arts, the philosophy and religious beliefs, the systems of government, the patterns of trade and economic organizations that have been developed here in Ghana, and the cultures of other African peoples and other regions of Africa. Ghana, that is to say, can only be understood in the total African context" (Nkrumah, 1963e:10). To this end, the Institute of African Studies, among other structures, established the Department of Music and Drama, which taught both theoretical and practical performing arts. This bore fruit in the formation of Ghana Dancing Ensemble, which successfully toured Europe and America in the sixties. Another crucial role played by the Institute of African Studies is the creation of African Studies programme for all first year university students including science and medicine. The programme was composed of all facets of African Studies. Its purpose was and still is to help African students retrieve their African heritage and identity. No student is allowed to graduate unless he or she passes this course.

Also important is the view that education was neglected during the Nkrumah era – a view Armah conveys in *Fragments* when he refers to "an unfinished NEW TECHNICAL SCHOOL whose foundations were laid many years ago". This suggestion of neglected educational system, is however, refuted by the fact that Nkrumah's educational structure was the most impressive achievement of his political career. In 1951, when the CPP won the general elections and Nkrumah became the Leader of Government Business, he initiated a comprehensive educational policy entitled Accelerated Development Plan for Education for the Gold Coast. During the opening remarks of an address given on the occasion of opening the Lever Brothers Soap Factory at Tema on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1963, Nkrumah outlined the results of the educational policy introduced in 1951. He declared that "The education policy inaugurated by the Convention People's Party in 1951, when for the first time we had a limited degree of control over our own affairs is now bearing fruit. We have a growing number of skilled technicians, and in some fields the technical ability of our workers can today compare favourably with that of any country in the world"

(Nkrumah, 1963b:1).

The Accelerated Development Plan for Education (1951) provided a free six-year primary education. This six-year primary education was designed to be either followed by entrance to secondary grammar school, secondary technical, technical institute, the newly created middle school, or to a teacher training college for two years, for a Certificate 'B' award. According to E. A. Haizel in his essay entitled "Education in Ghana 1951-1966" (1993), "Free primary education came into existence in 1952. Ten years later, in 1962, progress in primary education was regarded satisfactory enough to warrant the announcement of compulsory primary education" (Haizel, 1993:59). Nkrumah also planned "primary technical schools" which ran side by side with the traditional primary schools. These were designed to give technical training to boys and girls "so that by the time a pupil leaves the primary school he or she will have gained sufficient training to make him or her a semi-skilled worker" (Haizel, 1993: 58).

Nkrumah added science and technology to the curriculum of grammar schools in order to provide a balanced educational system for Ghana. In a speech entitled *The Noble Task of Teaching Accra* given to Ghanaian teachers on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1961, Nkrumah highlighted the core of his education policy for Ghana:

At the primary level we have to aim at a completely literate working population. We need to expand the teacher training system to provide the teachers for universal education. We need to expand the secondary school system itself to feed our universities continuously. Facilities for technical education should be extended so that our industrialization can move forward without over-dependence on imported skills. We need finally to expand and adapt our university system to provide a greater variety of courses which will have relevance to the needs of our country. (Nkrumah, 1961:3)

To implement the educational policy outlined above, Nkrumah established the Ghana Education Trust. The purpose of the Ghana Educational Trust was to build secondary schools, technical schools and colleges all over the country – institutions which will create additional secondary school places for the increased numbers of primary school leavers generated by the Accelerated Development Plan for Education initiated in 1951. Haizel reports that "before long, secondary schools and colleges sprang up from Half Assini to Keta [along the coastline of Ghana], and from

La Bone through Acherensua and Tamale to Tumu” [from the southern to the northern part of Ghana] (Haizel, 1993-64). Nkrumah did not stop here. He expanded the secondary school facilities for both existing secondary schools and colleges and also for the newly built Ghana Education Trust schools and colleges. Thus, sixth form facilities were expanded and commercial subjects were introduced into the school curriculum. To crown it all, Nkrumah together with English speaking West African countries, established the West African Examinations Council in 1959 to replace the Cambridge University Examinations Council. This last act effectively Africanized the final authority on secondary school examinations. The success of Nkrumah’s secondary education policies is demonstrated by the fact that currently, the number of sixth form scholars who qualify for entry into Ghana’s four universities far outnumber the available places at the universities, which were not expanded since Nkrumah’s overthrow.

Secondary education was complemented by the building of teacher training colleges. When Nkrumah noticed that most of the teachers were leaving the teaching profession because of poor working conditions, he initiated a course of action in his address to Parliament in 1964 to solve the problem:

The recruitment and retention of teachers of all types has become increasingly difficult because of the unattractive salaries and conditions of service in the teaching profession relative to other occupations. It is proposed to adjust salary scales of teachers to make them at least comparable to those in other occupations for which similar qualifications are required. (Nkrumah, 1964c:5)

The upgrading of the conditions of service for teachers included study leave with full pay as long as the teacher had served the government for two years before embarking upon his or her further education. This was an attractive condition of service which enabled this writer to receive university education. Linked to the development of teacher training education is that Nkrumah established two more universities. To produce graduate science teachers, Nkrumah established the University College of Cape Coast. The second university Nkrumah built and named after himself was the Kwame Nkrumah University College of Science and Technology, which is now a full fledged university. This institution was established solely for training scientists and engineers. The most fundamental feature of Nkrumah’s university education was that it was completely free. Another important attribute of Nkrumah’s university educational policies is that

all students were, in exception of qualified teachers who were on study leave with full pay, paid substantial allowances to enable them to buy books and other materials necessary for university education. Teacher training education was also totally free like university education. Nkrumah's plan to make primary and secondary education free was not implemented before his overthrow in 1966.

Besides universities, Nkrumah also established an academy, and research institutes. The Academy of Learning and the National Research Council were inaugurated by the Duke of Edinburgh in 1959. These were later combined to form the Academy of Sciences. On November 30, 1963, Nkrumah outlined the creation and the functions of the Academy of Sciences in a speech entitled *Strength and Power* (1963d):

The Academy of Sciences was created ... as a new and dynamic body to assume full responsibility for the co-ordination of all aspects of research and the promotion of scientific pursuits and learning. In this way we have combined in one institution the fundamental academic functions originally envisaged for the Academy of Learning and the applied scientific research so vital to our national development. We expect that from this amalgamation will grow strength and power which will push us faster in the development of sciences and literary arts.

We do not conceive the functions of the Academy as passive, or as the mere collection and compilation of data from our universities and research stations. The Academy is expected to design and carry out research programmes related to the life, changes and growth of our society. For this reasons, the Academy has under it about twenty research institutes. (Nkrumah, 1963d:2)

To complete his dream of initiating the culture of science and technology in Ghana, Nkrumah laid the foundation stone for the Ghana Atomic Reactor at Kwabenya, a project which was not completed. Owing to this innovative approach to education in Ghana, it is a misrepresentation to suggest that education was neglected during the Nkrumah regime. While the Academy of Sciences and the Kwame Nkrumah University College of Science and Technology were created to produce scientists and engineers, there was a further need to train more academics of science and technology. In this direction, Nkrumah made available state scholarships to Ghanaians to study abroad. In *Why Are We So Blest?* Armah maintains that scholarship schemes operated by foreign governments, particularly, by Euro-American donors, were designed to turn the African students into slave factors and neo-colonial agents who exploit the illiterate masses for the benefit of Euro-



America. The question which needs to be posed is whether African states' scholarships are also manipulated to achieve the same result. Armah argues that the educated Westernized Africans (the African intelligentsia) tend to behave as "privileged servants of white empire" and that Africa's educational systems have been mystified "into an elitist ritual for selecting slave traders" (*Why Are We So Blest?* p. 222).

A glaring shortcoming of the Nkrumah regime, however, is lack of freedom of the press. When Ghana achieved independence on 6 March 1957, there were about ten newspapers, most of which were privately owned. By the time Nkrumah was toppled by a military coup in 1966, all the privately owned newspapers had disappeared because of restrictive laws designed to proscribe and to stop their publications. P. A. V. Ansah outlines the demise of privately owned newspapers in his "Kwame Nkrumah and the Mass Media" (Ansah, 1993: 88):

By the time of Nkrumah's overthrow in February 1966, government control of the newspaper was total. From about ten newspapers at the time of independence, with most of them privately owned by Ghanaian nationals, by 1966, the government or the party owned and controlled all the newspapers, the resilient *Ashanti Pioneer* having been subjected to consistent censorship from 1960 and eventually closed down in October 1962.<sup>5</sup> With the passage of the Newspaper Licensing Act, 1963 (Act 187), which required a person to obtain a licence before publishing a newspaper, it became virtually impossible for anyone outside government or party circles to establish or continue to operate a newspaper.

This lack of press freedom validates the thesis that Nkrumah's Ghana is dominated by absence of individual freedom and political tyranny. Nkrumah repeatedly expressed his opposition to the private ownership of newspapers, in spite of the fact that he had privately owned three newspapers, which he exploited to undermine the colonial administration and to mobilize the masses. According to Ansah, "some of the basic tenets" of Nkrumah's "blend of press theories are that the press should be always subordinate to established authority and that deviations from official policies or unacceptable attacks on, or criticisms of authority could be treated as criminal offences; and prior censorship could be justified for the purpose of maintaining public order, ensuring national stability and reinforcing the legitimacy of political authority" (Ansah, 1993:91). Nkrumah's almost morbid hatred of an opposition press probably stemmed from his personal experience and his awareness of the powerful role the press could play in shaping the

consciousness and the mind of the masses. He could not forget how the *Ashanti Pioneer* aided the near secession of Ashanti during the difficult decolonizing years.

The view on press freedom in Ghana during the Nkrumah era is conveyed by Asante-Smith to Baako in *Fragments* when the Director of Ghanavision tells Baako that there are no films left for his screenplays because they are all reserved for Nkrumah and his ministers. Asante-Smith explains the setup to Baako: “‘You’ll see. We have to follow the Head of State and try to get pretty pictures of him and those around him ... We had a lecture before you came. A nation is built through glorifying its big shots. That’s our job, anyway’” (p.133). *The Beautiful Ones* also portrays how the radio devotes all its attention to idolizing Nkrumah, the President. Using the Man as the focalizer, Armah writes: “He turned on the set as soon as he entered the hall, and in a few moments he had caught the tail end of the news, all the ritual bits of praise that seemed to be all the news these days. Osagyefo the President bla bla bla bla” (p. 127). Armah’s fictional representation of how Nkrumah converted the mass media into instruments for building his political image and hero-worshipping cult echoes faithfully the political history of the mass media during the Nkrumah era. To explore this theme, it is crucial to begin with the history of the press before the advent of Nkrumah into the political arena.

Since Nkrumah’s concept of the press saw it as a subservient instrument of government or the party in power, the Radio became, like the other instruments of the media, a brainwashing tool which was tightly controlled by the government. This interpretation is confirmed by Ansah:

Radio under Nkrumah, then like the other media, became not a forum for free public discussion on national issues, but a closely guarded and tightly controlled propaganda machine for achieving the major objective of political education, the promotion of socialist ideals, national unity at home, the projection of Ghana’s image and foreign policy abroad and for the liberation and unification of Africa. Another important objective was to counter the ‘vile and vicious propaganda’ to which he and his government were being constantly subjected. (Ansah, 1993:91)

In his work, *Africa Must Unite* (1963a), Nkrumah defended his repressive press laws by arguing that “the freedom of the press which he had tolerated in years immediately following independence had been abused by the opposition which never missed an opportunity to stigmatize the government and subject him to ‘special attack, abuse and ridicule’. Press freedom”, Nkrumah

asserted, (Ansah, 1993:96) “had been `debased into licence.” Nkrumah contended that the attacks mounted through the opposition press against him and his government subverted national unity and rendered almost impossible the task of nation-building. In his own words, “This was not freedom of expression. This was irresponsible licence, and if allowed to continue unbridled, it would have undermined our state, our independence and the people’s faith in themselves and their capacities” (Nkrumah, 1963a:76).

The greatest irrefutable evidence of tyranny under Nkrumah was the fact that all Nkrumah’s political opponents were either imprisoned under the Preventive Detention Act or driven into exile. Some aspects of Armah’s fictional portrait of Nkrumah concerning his establishment of one-party dictatorship faithfully conforms to the political history of Ghana. Armah exploits the notorious Preventive Detention Act (1958) which made it possible for Nkrumah to imprison his political opponents without trial and how the dethroned Nkrumahists were given the taste of their own medicine when the soldiers who overthrew them imprisoned them without trial under the old Preventive Detention Act renamed Protective Custody. Armah alludes to this ironic reversal in *The Beautiful Ones* as follows: “They said all big Party [CPP] men were being arrested and placed in something called protective custody – already a new name for old imprisonment without trial. New people, new style, old dance” (p. 157). The greatest irrefutable evidence of tyranny under Nkrumah was the fact that all Nkrumah’s political opponents were either imprisoned under the Preventive Detention Act or driven into exile. The most notable opposition politicians who were eliminated from politics in this way were Dr J. B. Danquah, the founder of the UGCC, who made Nkrumah the Secretary General of the UGCC and became the most outspoken leader of opposition. Dr Danquah died in Nkrumah’s prison in 1963. Another opposition leader was Prof A. K. Busia, whom Nkrumah drove into exile in 1964. Nkrumah’s dictatorial political ideology had no room for an organized opposition party. Afari-Gyan points out that Nkrumah’s “views about centralized authority and about his party left virtually no room for an organized opposition party. Nkrumah conceived sovereignty, in Hobbesian fashion, to be indivisible. This, plus his conception of the ruling party as the embodiment of the national will, made opposition to the ruling party no less than opposition to the very essence of the nation. An opposition party is thus rendered illegitimate” (Afari-Gyan, 1993:170). In his *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (1957), Nkrumah described the members of the opposition as “disgruntled and

disappointed politicians who were against the common man and were determined to undermine the democratic process.” He concluded that the leaders of the opposition party were “reactionaries” carrying out “vicious and treacherous” activities ( Nkrumah, 1957: 89-90).

Another evidence of how Nkrumah dealt with his political opponents is revealed in his manipulation of CPP activists as destoolment agitators who removed anti-CPP chiefs from power. The classic example of this was the establishment of a commission of enquiries into the affairs of Asanteman Council and the Akyem Abuakwa Council for forming the National Liberation Movement, the Asante ethnic party which prolonged the struggle for independence by asking for federal constitution for Ghana. Through the enactment of two Acts in 1958, Nkrumah not only weakened chieftaincy in general but he also succeeded in destroying the economic power base of the two most powerful traditional states which supported the opposition party. In his “The Search for `Constitutional Chieftaincy,`” Kwame Arhin reveals how Nkrumah reduced the powerful Asantehene and Akyem Abuakwahene to subservient agents of the ruling government:

The enactment of the two Acts also enabled the government to pass the Ashanti Stool Lands Act (No. 28 of 1958) which transferred the trusteeship and management of all lands vested in the Golden Stool and its occupant, the Asantehene, to the Governor-General; and also the Akyem Abuakwa (Stool Revenue) Act of 1958, which provided ‘for the control of the revenues and property in the Akyem Abuakwa State and for the application of those revenues’ by a Receiver appointed by the Minister of Local Government and acting under his instructions (*Parliamentary Debates*).

The passage of these two Acts clipped the economic wings of the Asantehene and the Akyem Abuakwahene, who now needed to submit all their financial budgets to use revenues from Stool Lands to the Governor-General and the Minister of Local Government for approval. Like their former function under the colonial administration, the chiefs had become figureheads to be exploited by the Nkrumah government.

Perhaps the most devastating castigation of the Nkrumah government is how his socialist economic policies turned Ghana into a world strangulated by economic ineptitude, rot, decay, and political corruption – a state of affairs which has turned Ghana into a monstrous pit latrine inhabited by maggots. Armah sustains this vision in *The Beautiful Ones*. This fictional portraiture



of the economic life of Ghanaians captures very realistically the woeful economic state of Ghana during the Nkrumah era. In *Africa Betrayed* (1992), Ayittey outlines the fundamental basis of Nkrumah's socialist economic policy stating that:

Nkrumah was constantly haunted by the spectre of imperialism and neocolonialism, which he claimed 'is only the old colonialism with a facade of African stooges'. He believed that only socialism could effectively check the evil machinations of neocolonialism and felt himself obliged to enlighten his fellow African heads of state. In sum, for Nkrumah, socialism would initiate a rapid social transformation of the Ghanaian society, would create a "veritable paradise of abundance and satisfaction", would check the "evil machinations of imperialism and neocolonialism," would foster "economic independence" in an adverse colonial heritage, would serve "in the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle," and would liberate the oppressed continent of Africa. (Ayittey, 1992:166)

The main thrust of Ayittey's argument is that Africans must stop blaming the Western imperialism and neo-colonialism for the dismal failures of their leaders. Notwithstanding the wisdom of this position, the West cannot be totally absolved from its interference in the internal affairs of Africa as the involvement of the West in the overthrow of Nkrumah has demonstrated. Like the rest of African states, Nkrumah's socialist economic plans produced no plenitude as he had dreamed when he launched his 1961 Seven Year Development Plan. Ayittey reports the dismal economic state of African leaders, who emulated Nkrumah's socialist economic policy as follows: "The state-controlled economic plans of Nkrumah and the rest of Africa (excluding South Africa and Botswana) produced nothing but economic misery and disintegration, political chaos, and institutional and social decay. The decline in per capital income has been calamitous for many African countries. Agricultural growth has been dismal, producing chronic food shortages and an ever-present threat of famine" (Ayittey, 1992:8). Ayittey's analysis of the agricultural output in Africa does not represent the state of affairs in Ghana during the Nkrumah era. K B. Asante's "Nkrumah and State Enterprises" (1993), appears to challenge Ayittey's thesis. Asante argues that:

... it is believed by many that the economic situation in Ghana would have been better if Nkrumah had followed the advice contained in the [Arthur Lewis] report, that he should have concentrated on agriculture and not wasted resources on state enterprises. Nkrumah did not neglect agriculture as we shall later see. This belief is not supported by facts. He regarded agriculture and industry as complementary

or mutually supportive. (Asante, 1993:255).

Asante's argument is validated by the fact that in 1951, Nkrumah initiated the 'Grow More Food' campaign and "the Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources stated in Parliament that Government 'was exploring all avenues to stimulate the growth of more food. Government will adopt any constructive ideas of Parliamentarians'" (*Legislative Assembly Debates*). To increase the production of food, the Nkrumah government set up a chain of experimental agricultural stations "with the aim, amongst others, of improving the old methods of shifting cultivation by trying to find better and improved methods of dealing with the land" (Asante, 1993:255). Another misrepresentation in Ayittey's analysis of state enterprises which he suggested were introduced by independent African leaders is not supported by facts as far as Nkrumah is concerned. Asante reveals Ayittey's distortion by writing that:

The report of the activities of the Industrial Development Corporation which succeeded the Industrial Development Board, dated 6<sup>th</sup> November, 1951, (the year Nkrumah took charge of Government Business but with expatriates effectively in control), stated that three subsidiary companies had been formed, each with an African Managing-Director. These were a laundry, a saw-milling and hand-weaving companies. There were losses due to 'delays in arrival and installation of machinery, lack of sales and initial problems of administration' (*Parliamentary Debates*). The problems of state enterprises there started before Nkrumah came on the scene and have persisted since his departure. (Asante, 1993:253-254)

That state enterprises were in existence before Nkrumah took over power in 1951 – state corporations which failed abysmally – is the most powerful indictment of Nkrumah's failure to learn from the past poor performance of state enterprises and the failure of his socialist economic policy. The economic myopia of the Nkrumah government is lucidly revealed by an incident in Parliament. Asante points out that (Asante, 1993:259) "even though Minister of Communications admitted that Ghana Airways Corporation was making deficits of about £G200,000 to £G300,000 yearly, Parliament on November 20, 1959, moved 'That this house record its appreciation of the *magnificent progress* which has been made by the Ghana Airways Corporation during its short existence'" (*Parliamentary Debates*, 1959). This suggests that the Nkrumah government, which saw economic deficits as an occasion for self-congratulation, was not interested in the profitability of the state enterprises but saw them purely as propaganda show

pieces designed to announce to the capitalist world and Africa that Nkrumah was in control of both the political and the economic destiny of Ghana.

Ayittey sums up the economic controls Nkrumah introduced in order to enable the state to control all aspects of Ghana's economy (Ayittey, 1992:166):

He imposed a bewildering array of legislative controls and regulations to assure state participation in the economy. There were controls on imports, capital transfers, industry, minimum wages, the rights and powers of trade unions, prices, rents, and interest rates. Although some of these controls had been introduced by the colonialists, Nkrumah retained and expanded them. He nationalized private businesses and set up many state enterprises with little planning or projections of cost. For example, when the sugar factory at Asuatuare was completed, it stood idle in 1964 for more than a year because someone forgot to include a water supply system in the construction plans. Thus Nkrumah began his massive industrialization effort under the impetus of socialism.

Nkrumah's imposition of price controls which require producers and importers to charge prices lower than the free-market prices led to shortages of commodities as producers and importers cut output. The state enterprises, which were supposed to solve the problem of shortages by producing enough goods to ease these acute shortages of consumer commodities, failed miserably in their task and produced only a little amount of goods. To remedy the problem of public demand for goods being greater than the available supply, Nkrumah began to ration goods. The need to obtain more ration coupons than the allocated share of ration coupons created two interrelated and pernicious problems: bribery and corruption.

Another major issue which needs to be discussed is the allegation that Nkrumah established a neo-colonialist state in Ghana – a theme which features prominently in Armah's fiction. This thesis is espoused by Ayittey in his *Africa Betrayed*. However, the political history of Ghana reveals that there is no substance in the assertion that Nkrumah established a neo-colonial government which was indistinguishable from the British colonial administration in the Gold Coast. Actually, Nkrumah's anti-neo-colonial role from 1957 till his death in 1972 seriously question this thesis. This view is confirmed by Kwesi Jonah in his essay entitled "Nkrumah and Decolonization of Ghana's External Trade Relations 1956-1965" (1993). Jonah argues that "The concept of neo-colonialism cannot be discussed without reference to Nkrumah, who perhaps more than anyone

else, contributed to its birth and development. In the second year of Ghana's independence, precisely in April 1958, Nkrumah, in his welcome address to representatives at the Conference of Independent African States held in Accra, warned that Africa had to contend with not only 'old forms of colonialism' but also the 'new forms of colonialism'" (Jonah, 1993:325).

Nkrumah's determination to resist neo-colonialism is further revealed in the fact that even before the publication of his famous *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), he had devoted a full chapter in *Africa Must Unite* (1963) to the concept. In both *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* and *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* (1968) he defined neo-colonialism "as the use of economic power to control the political fortunes of Independent African States, while Africans maintained a semblance of Independence" (Hagan, 1993:197). Nkrumah argued that the exploitative world economic system and Africa's dependence on the world commodity market and international financial management and technology as a source of economic development would rob African states of the power to make their own decisions.

An analysis of the state of affairs in contemporary Africa suggests that Nkrumah's thesis is irrefutable. Hagan's illuminating comment on this theme needs to be cited:

Nkrumah might have added a rider to his axiom of neo-colonialism; namely, that the degree to which African states will weaken, and the extent of their dependence on international agencies, would correlate directly to the extent to which Africans mismanage their own affairs. In other words while Nkrumah claimed for Africans 'the right to manage or mismanage ourselves' he should have added a caution, that mismanagement was the surest way of putting Africans back in the clutches of the more powerful economic powers. (Hagan, 1993:197)

Since a neo-colonial country is one that has all the outward trappings of independence, but whose major policies are in reality controlled from outside, the question to consider is whether Nkrumah allowed Western powers to control the destiny of Ghana during his rule. Nkrumah was acutely conscious of the pervasiveness of neo-colonialism and why it was impossible for any African country to avoid it completely. In his essay, "Nkrumah's Ideology" (1993), K. Afari-Gyan states that:

Nkrumah says that no new nation is going to be able to do away with Western



capital or the international corporations. In fact, it is the indispensability of foreign capital for the development of the new nations which brings them face to face with neo-colonialism. Thus, what requires critical examination in the relationship between a new nation and a Western financier that results from the infusion of Western capital. In this regard, the question is whether the new nation is able to retain such integrity and control over its resources and institutions that Western capital is not used to impoverish its people. Thus, for Nkrumah the essential difference among the new nations is between 'those states that accept neo-colonialism as a policy and those which resist it'. (Afari-Gyan, 1993:165)

The question which readily comes to mind is how neo-colonialism can be resisted? According to Nkrumah, the first thing to is that the people of African states must learn all the machinations of neo-colonialism and must recognize that it militates against their economic progress. They must also realize that the forces of neo-colonialism are too strong for any one African state to defeat alone. It is therefore clear that Nkrumah cannot be accused of deliberately creating a neo-colonial state or failing to resist it, for he had intimate knowledge of neo-colonialism and recognized it as the most pernicious obstacle to true development of an independent country. What is not certain is whether he succeeded in warding off neo-colonialism from Ghana during his reign. One crucial incident appears to support the view, however, that Nkrumah was not a puppet leader who danced to the tune played by Western economic powers. In his attempt to break the powerful economic stronghold the Western powers had over Ghana because of trade relations, Nkrumah diversified Ghana's external trade by establishing economic relations with the Communist Block. In 1965 when Nkrumah applied for loans from both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, he was told that the loans would only be granted if he stopped all trade relations with the Communist Block. The government of Ghana "could not accept" (Jonah, 1993:334) the condition attached to the granting of the loans by the IMF and the World Bank. Nkrumah rejected the conditions and the loans were not granted. This is a classic example of how Nkrumah resisted neo-colonialism.

But Nkrumah's anti-neo-colonial trade relations with Euro-America, his socialist economic strategies, his morbid hatred for imperialism and colonialism and his Pan-Africanist foreign policy, reveals that he showed no trace of love for Europe and Europeans. Indeed, his political career was dominated by one obsession: to purge the African continent of European influence. This life long dream led to his overthrow, which was masterminded by the American CIA (Ankomah and

Afrani, 1997:14).

That Nkrumah devoted his life to stamping out neo-colonialism and imperialism from Africa is sustained by his “decision to take Ghana out of such regional arrangements as the West African Airways Corporation, the West African Currency Board, the West African Cocoa Research Institute and the West African Court of Appeal which were created during the British colonial administration to foster cooperation among the British dependencies in West Africa” (Obed Asamoah, 1993:236). This contradicted his policy of maximum inter-African cooperation. Obviously, this was a political blunder but Nkrumah’s hatred for neo-colonialism and imperialism was greater than the need for political and economic expediency. Thus, Nkrumah argued at the time that he had no choice because the regional bodies “were colonial appendages which a sovereign, independent Ghana had to shed” (Asamoah, 1993:236).

As the first sub-Saharan country to attain independence from colonial rule, Ghana under Nkrumah played a much unprecedented role in African continental affairs than might otherwise have been expected from a country of its size – a political feat which was only made possible because of Nkrumah’s visionary leadership. Fortunately for Nkrumah, Ghana at that time was well-endowed with natural and human wealth to play leadership role in Pan-Africanism. Asamoah, in his “Nkrumah’s Foreign Policy” outlines the favourable conditions which made Ghana a pace setter for the total liberation of Africa:

Ghana supplied one-third of the world’s cocoa as well as one-fifth of its gold. Our external reserves at independence were over half a billion dollars which was more than India, for instance, had at a comparative time of her history. This degree of wealth meant that the Nkrumah administration had no pressing need to seek massive aid anywhere. It was against this background that Ghana was transformed into the torch-bearer of African irredentism and unity, a matter of pride which we still cherish to this day. Nkrumah became a symbol of what Africa could be and of necessity a foe of imperialism designs on Africa. This, among other things, sealed his doom. (Asamoah, 1993:240)

Nkrumah’s Marxist rhetoric brought the powerful Western powers against him. According to Ankomah and Afrani, “Britain and America had always suspected him to be a communist and in the middle of the Cold War between the West and the Soviets, the West felt the wings of Nkrumah had to be clipped – and fast before he ‘contaminated’ the whole of Africa” (Ankomah

and Afrani, 1997:11). Ankomah and Afrani assert that to prevent Nkrumah from implementing his "Development Plans," which would have transformed Ghana into "an economic tiger," the West set out deliberately to sabotage his plans economically and politically. The economic success would have been emulated by the rest of Africa. This situation would have threatened the West's economic and political stronghold on the continent. The quickest way to undermine Nkrumah's economic power was to manipulate the international cocoa price and this was exactly what the West did. Ankomah and Afrani expose how the West sabotaged Nkrumah's attempt to industrialize Ghana:

In 1955 cocoa exports made up 68% of Ghana's trade abroad, thus at independence, Nkrumah inherited enough money [half a billion US dollars] to quickly turn Ghana into an "economic tiger". When he launched his 7-year development plan in the early 60s (after an earlier 5-year development plan had run out), the international cocoa price stood at £480 a ton, by 1966 when he was overthrown, the cocoa price had collapsed to £60 a ton. The markets of the West set the cocoa price! And if you consider that cocoa was Ghana's No. 1 export product, you can imagine the effect this had on the economy under Nkrumah, and why he "*failed*", if he failed. (Ankomah and Afrani, 1997:12)

Nkrumah's desire for the economic emancipation of Africa was the reason for his opposition to association of African states with the EEC. In his speech on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1960, to the Conference on Positive Action and Security in Africa, after lampooning association with the EEC as a classic example of neo-colonialism/ new imperialism, he called for the industrialization of Africa as the only way of ensuring its economic freedom – an autarchy free from the economic and political control of the West. Nkrumah continued to enunciate how Africa could become an economic unity. Nkrumah argued that "this can only happen if the artificial boundaries that divide her are broken down so as to provide for viable economic units, and ultimately a single African unit. This means an African common market, a common currency area and the development of communications of all kinds to allow the free flow of goods and services. International capital can be attracted to such viable economic areas, but it would not be attracted to a divided and balkanized Africa, with each small region engaged in senseless and suicidal economic competition with its neighbours" (Nkrumah, 1962c:218).

Nkrumah linked Africa's economic development to his vision of United States of Africa as

envisaged by 1945 Manchester Pan-Africanism Conference he co-organized with George Padmore. This political experience became the fulcrum around which his multifarious political policies were centred. During the All-African People's Conference in December 1958, Nkrumah declared, "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things will be added unto it." That this conference was dedicated to the freedom struggle in Africa made it possible for representatives of freedom-fighters throughout Africa to attend it. Asamoah outlines the objectives and the practical assistance Nkrumah put in place for helping the African nationalist liberation movements in their struggles for independence:

In pursuit of this goal every conceivable assistance was made available to the liberation movements for the prosecution of the struggle against the colonial and racist regimes on the continent. Accordingly, a special fund was created for concrete financial assistance to the liberation movements; similarly the African Bureau was set up to offer direct financial, propaganda and military support to the struggle. Additionally refugees from South Africa, Namibia, Rhodesia and other colonial dependencies in Africa were granted placements, scholarships and other facilities in our educational institutions and even employment opportunities where necessary in order to help prepare them for the struggle ahead. Indeed, so dear was the liberation cause to the heart of Nkrumah that no less a body than the African Affairs Secretariat which, at the time, functioned as a separate and autonomous organ from the Ministry of External Affairs (as it was then called), was assigned responsibility under the direct supervision and control of Dr Kwame Nkrumah himself for the formulation and direction of our African policy in this regard. (Asamoah, 1993:237-238)

Though Nkrumah was intensely sincere and well intentioned, his African continental foreign policy and tactics alarmed some African leaders, aroused envy, and provoked opposition which led to charges of Black imperialism and subversion of sister African states. Thus, to counteract Nkrumah's formation of Casablanca group composed of Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Togo, and the Congo, the moderate African states led by Liberia's President Tubman, having been prodded by imperialist forces, formed the Monrovia group with the sole purpose of championing devalued concepts of African unity and subverting Nkrumah's influence. When the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was eventually formed in Addis Ababa in 1963, "it was based on the notion of functional or diplomatic unity rather than a fusion of sovereignty, but Nkrumah enthusiastically supported it" (Asamoah, 1993:240). Asamoah argues that the cause of lack of enthusiasm for Nkrumah's policy of United States of Africa stemmed partially from his



subversive activities committed against other African states:

That the rest of Africa did not seem to share Nkrumah's vision of a United States of Africa was only partially his fault. His opposition to Nyerere over the creation of an East African community and his dealings with political parties some of whom were in opposition to the Governments of other African states could not have been helpful in enhancing his prospects for a Union; and the opportunities missed in fostering unity with Togo particularly under Olympio did not do credit to his strategy. Whatever the tactical errors, Nkrumah's conviction was sincere and thanks largely to him, the concept of African unity gained currency and his dream lives on the reality that without it Africa is incapable of escaping from its position of economic servitude and political impotence. (Asamoah, 1993:240)

Perhaps, it is ironic that although Armah repudiates Nkrumah and maintains that he betrays Africa, he upholds Nkrumah's dream of united Africa – a vision which permeates Armah's corpus. In *The Beautiful Ones*, which is regarded as Armah's most pessimistic novel the novelist introduces a ray of hope when he refers to "the green flowering" which may bring about a transformation. The vision of muted hope of Africa's future rebirth and unity resurfaces in *Two Thousand Seasons* and is powerfully rehearsed in *The Healers*. Owing to Nkrumah's determination to achieve African unity, he was impatient of others with dissimilar views. He worsened matters by assisting or dealing with opposition political groups in Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Togo, Nigeria and Gambia. Nkrumah was accused of subversion and interfering in internal affairs of neighbouring countries. According to Asamoah, "By the time of the military coup of 1966 Nkrumah's influence in Africa was waning precisely because of this and other reasons, and Ghana was suffering from some degree of isolation" (Asamoah, 1993:245). It must be reiterated that Nkrumah's determination to annihilate neo-colonialism and his dream of establishing the United States of Africa was unwavering – an obsession which led to his overthrow. Ankomah and Afrani endorse this view as follows:

Later, evidence came out in America (revealed by former CIA agents themselves) that Nkrumah's overthrow was masterminded by the Americans with the active support from their cousins in Europe. One of the reasons for his overthrow was that the West did not like his drive for African unity. That was a threat to the West's economic and political control of Africa. To stop the enterprise, Nkrumah, the chief proponent of African unity, had to go. (Ankomah and Afrani, 1997:14)

This quotation is not only a classic example of the destructiveness and subversive tactics of neo-

colonialist powers against Africa, which preoccupied Nkrumah, but also the most authentic endorsement of his foreign and external trade policies. Nkrumah's legacy to Africa and the Black Diaspora is further gilded when his irrefutable assessment and predictions of the insidious machinations of neo-colonialist powers in Africa are gradually being fulfilled. The political and economic decay and chaos which currently threaten the continent was foreseen by Nkrumah. Nkrumah warned that unless African states organised themselves into United States of Africa – a political and economic strategy which would create an African Economic Common Market with a single currency and one custom union, which could “jet-propel” the continent into an economic tiger– Africa would be doomed. The current political and economic malaise in contemporary Africa is a clear fulfilment of Nkrumah's dire warnings and predictions.

It is crucial to submit Armah's criticism of the cultural demise in Ghana to scrutiny. Armah presents a detailed portrayal of how Ghanaians have turned their backs to the cultural treasures of their country in both *The Beautiful Ones* and *Fragments*. Armah introduces this theme by exploiting very ingeniously the ill-fated outdoor ceremony of Araba's premature baby in *Fragments* – a traditional event which Baako's mother and sister, Efua and Araba, organize not for the sake of their belief in the ancient traditions of their ancestors but solely for raising money. Another incident which sustains Armah's condemnation of Ghana's seduction by European ethos in *Fragments* is how traditional ditties are purged out of the Ghanaian heritage and replaced by European children's lyrics like *Jack and Jill*, which is totally unfamiliar to the tongues of the African children. Worse than this is the fact that Ghanaian women have become addicted to bleaching their black skins with “Ambi-Extra”, a skin-lightening cream. We are also told that Ghanaian women have become very crude and un-African. This view is conveyed by Araba's decision to use her “bottom power” (sex) in persuading her husband, Kwesi, to agreeing to have their baby son outdoored prematurely against the sacrosanct traditions. Armah crowns his indictment of the ruling elite in Ghana by manipulating Brempong, whom he caricatures as the walking parody of the European. In *The Beautiful Ones* Armah also refers to Ghana's seduction by European culture and ways, *aborofosem*. Koomson, who drives flashy cars and is always in immaculate suit and turns his palatial house into a museum for storing quaint and exotic European objects, which all shine brilliantly, is the ultimate symbol of this obsession with Europe. The question which is already discussed is did Nkrumah put in place any cultural policy to counteract

the war of destruction of African culture waged by colonialism? Clearly, Nkrumah established a powerful cultural policy in Ghana which lay the foundation for modern Ghana's cultural heritage.

In his three novels with postcolonial settings, Armah focuses on the chronic political ineptitude and corruption, which is brilliantly treated in *The Beautiful Ones* in which political corruption and foulness have become the normal way of life. In the first novel Armah discusses the Professor William Abraham Commission of Enquiry into Political Corruption in the Nkrumah government. In his own words, the narrator asserts that "There was a lot of noise, for some time, about some investigation designed to rid the country's trade of corruption. De-uncorrupt themselves? ... The head of it was a professor from Legon [University of Ghana]... The net had been made in special Ghanaian way that allowed the really big corrupt people to pass through it. A net to catch only the small, dispensable fellows, trying in their anguished blindness to leap and attain the gleam and the comfort the only way these things could be done. And the big ones floated free, like all the slogans. End bribery and corruption" (p. 154). The Anne Jagge Commission of Enquiry which probed the assets of Nkrumah's ministers and CPP functionaries in 1966 after the military take-over reveals that many of the ministers had amassed wealth through corrupt means. In *Why Are We Not So Blest?* the leadership of Africa's nationalist liberation movements are indicted for their corruption and betrayal of Africa. This theme is also treated in *Fragments* where both the educated intelligentsia and the rulers prostitute the African polity and continue to exploit the disenfranchised masses so that they could enjoy the eternal life of opulence. In the first novel the Nkrumahs and the Koomsons have transformed Ghana and the rest of Africa into a rotten and corrupt world inhabited by moral and political bankrupts.

In sum, it could be argued that Armah's fictional history which deals with the postcolonial novels does not exploit the entire political history of the Nkrumah era. While some areas of Armah's manipulation of the documented history of Ghana faithfully conform to Ghana's political history, other aspects of this fictional history subverts the history of the Nkrumah period. Thus, Armah both undermines and re-creates history. The aspects of Armah's deconstructed history which conform to Ghana's documented history are the absence of press freedom, the tyranny occasioned by the detention of political opponents without trial, betrayal of the masses, non-fulfilment of the promises made to the masses during the era of decolonization, the use of the mass media in

deifying Nkrumah's political image, corruption, economic ineptitude and self-installation in the Christianborg (Slave) Castle. The aspects of Armah's fictional history which are not reconcilable with Ghana's documented history are Armah's depiction of Nkrumah as a neo-colonial agent and the indictment that he neglected education and cultural development in Ghana.

## NOTES

1. This epigram is taken from Kwame Nkrumah's sermon originally given in a church in Pennsylvania, USA, in 1940.
2. Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1957), 1973, pp. 79, 80. Dennis Austin discussed the view in his *Politics in Ghana, 1949-1960*, (London: Heinemann, 1964), pp. 81-84.
3. See A.K. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System Of Ashanti*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 189-194 and David Apter, *Ghana in Transition*, (New York: Altheneum, 1963), p. 145.
4. Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1957), p.99. In this work, Nkrumah explained that what he had said could not be construed as a rejection of chieftaincy. His view was that if chiefs would not follow the wishes of the people then they would flee. However, such was the chiefs' fear that Nkrumah had to explain his stand on many different occasions. (See *I Speak of Freedom*, London: Heinemaann, 1961, p. 24).
5. Government Gazette, 19 October, 1962.

## Chapter Three

### Endless Cycles of Recurrent Historical Follies: Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*<sup>1</sup> presents Africa as a world trapped in perpetual cycles of decay, corruption, political ineptitude and historical follies. The theme of betrayal by the African leadership brilliantly treated in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and repeated in *Fragments* is continued in *Why Are We So Blest?*, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. The huge dreams and hopes which ushered in independence are perceived to have been turned into a nightmare – an unprecedented, historic, monumental, political backstabbing. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, who fiercely attacked colonialism and slavery in the Gold Coast during the decolonizing era, ends his political crusade as President of independent Ghana in the Christianborg (Slave) Castle in which he installs himself as the supreme postcolonial Black slave factor. Like Kamuzu in *The Healers*, Nkrumah has a compulsive ambition to live exactly like the former colonial governors of the Gold Coast.

The novel emerges as the most ruthless repudiation of the Ghanaian political leadership and by extension that of the rest of Africa. My argument is that there is a huge irony inherent in the change from the Gold Coast to Ghana, for the new name is really an ancient name taken from an ancient era, in which, according to Armah, Africa's legendary kings turned their people into serfs and slaves so that they could pursue the ideology of "the gleam". The decision to adopt the ancient Empire of Ghana's name was made because Kwame Nkrumah felt that the change from the colonial name to Ghana would be a tribute to the history of our people. Accordingly, Nkrumah commented in his *Motion of Destiny* which outlined the adoption of the new name in Legislative Assembly in Accra as follows:

We take pride in the name of Ghana, not out of romanticism, but as an inspiration for the future. It is right and proper that we should know about our past. For just as the future emerges from the present, so has the present emerged from the past. Nor need we be ashamed of our past. There was much in it of glory. What our ancestors achieved in the context of their contemporary society gives us confidence that we can create, out of the past, a glorious future, not in terms of war and military pomp, but in terms of social progress and peace. (Nkrumah, 1959: 163.)



This quotation does not only re-create the historical context of why modern Ghana adopted this ancient historical name but also reveals the clash between Armah fictional history and documented history. While Nkrumah and African and Black historians of the African Diaspora praised the glorious achievements of Ancient Ghana and other Ancient West African Empires Armah submits them to a renegade attack.

The novel deploys scatological and dystopian metaphors in order to reinforce its major concerns. A careful examination of the novel will demonstrate that the plot, the novelistic design, the style and the thematic patterning accentuate one basic preoccupation: recurrent historical blunders. Although well over 30 military *coup d'états* occurred in Africa between 1963 and 1973, which Armah dismisses as “a change of embezzlers and the hunted” (p. 162), no visible change has occurred in the life of the African masses. The military takeovers in Africa can be best described as changing of the guard resulting in cycles of futile historical and political improprieties. A survey of the political history of Ghana will reveal that Nkrumah’s socialist economic policy did not achieve the plenitude he hoped for but instead brought about economic chaos.

The Man’s futile attempts to live above the corrosive putrescence and corruption which engulf his world are doomed to abysmal failure: he is insulted by both his wife, mother-in-law and other leapers after “the gleam”(which represents all forms of political and moral corruption) and is labelled either “a wicked man” “who will never prosper *da*” (pp. 107; 28-32) or as “a fool and coward” whose naive self-righteousness blinds him from seeing the reality of his situation. My immediate concern here is to outline how African critics respond to Armah’s symbolism of manipulating excreta, filth, body odour and physical bodily excretions to convey his vision of human pretensions, chronic political villainy and the social decay of Kwame Nkrumah’s repressive regime in particular and of African states in general. Let us scrutinize the African critics’ negative reactions to Armah’s first novel and respond to these criticisms.

To Chinua Achebe *The Beautiful Ones* is “a sick book. Sick, not with the sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of the *human condition*” (Achebe, 1975:25). Another African intellectual, Jonathan Kariara, accuses Armah of “artistic arrogance” and adds that “the author had worried himself sick before he wrote the novel ....” (Kariara, 1976: 57). Ama Ata Aidoo also adversely criticizes the novel. This Ghanaian writer asserts that “whatever is beautiful and genuinely pleasing

in Ghana about Ghanaians seems to have gone unmentioned". She concludes that Ghanaians "could find it difficult to accept in physical terms the necessity for hammering on every page the shit and stink from people and the environment" (Aidoo, 1969: xii). Another negative commentary on the novel is made by D. I. Nwaga. The critic complains of a "predominating mood ... of powerlessness in the face of a normless socio-political state" (Nwaga, 1973: 25). And Leonard Kibera declares that "Armah's approach is caricature, that refuge of the cartoonist who is pressed for time" (Kibera, 1970: 67). Ben Obumsele adds to the African negative criticism of Armah's first novel by arguing that "The rejection of the family and 'familial warmth' is common to all Armah's positive characters. And yet the interlocking African system of family obligations which is spurned is so integral a part of African life that to turn away from it can only indicate the most complete alienation from the social system" (Obumsele, 1973: 114-115). Joining the controversy, the Ghanaian poet and novelist, Kofi Awoonor, charges Armah of displaying a warped vision which betrays the writer's long residence in Euro-America and his consequent failure to understand the dynamics of Kwame Nkrumah's revolutionary political experimentation (Awoonor, 1972: 23).

I would contend that the foregoing discussion of the reasons behind the unflattering critical commentaries on Armah's first novel by African critics has not unearthed the fundamental cause of the general African rejection of the novel: namely, the fact that *The Beautiful Ones* is the most devastating fictional indictment of the political corruption which strangulates Africa. Many Africans feel that Armah has gone too far in his indictment of the Nkrumah regime. Hence patriotic African intellectuals are furious and ashamed to see how Armah has surgically prised open with giant forceps Africa's ancient past and present, exposing degraded secrets of the Continent to outsiders. For them, Armah has no right to wash in public Africa's dirty political linen. The question is, should the African writer pursue the truth even if that truth subverts the African counter-image carefully refashioned by the first generation of radical intellectuals and master historians from both Africa and the Black Diaspora? Notwithstanding my feeling that the African artist must pursue the truth even if it hurts the revolutionary aspirations of the African Continent, the truth remains that the question at issue is the fact that Armah's disparaging portraiture of the endemic political corruption in Africa amounts to a virulent deglorification of Africa.

I suggest that this adverse critical reception given to Armah's first novel does not stem from the literary weaknesses of the novel but rather from the various political and ideological biases of the critics. This rather negative criticism is meticulously taken apart and brilliantly refuted by Derek Wright in his book, *Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa* (1987:1-16;81-137) and in his article entitled "Armah's Ghana Revisited" (1985). Wright argues that "Armah seems to have less interest in the particulars of the Nkrumah regime than in what it can be made to represent, in mytho-symbolic form, for Africa in the neocolonial phase" (1985:24). "The novel does not," Wright concludes, "behave like a piece of 'objective realism'" (1985:26). Also responding to African critics' hostile reaction to *The Beautiful Ones*, Robert Fraser in his work, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah* (1980:15), reports that "Confronted with a work so destructive of patriotic complacency, many [African] critics have tended to confuse the charge of treason with that of artistic deficiency. Hence Armah comes to be saddled with strictures which are essentially political rather than artistic in nature." Neil Lazarus also dismisses African critics' condemnation of Armah's first novel, in particular, Gakwandi's diatribe. Lazarus complains that "some critics have interpreted Armah's exposé and repudiation of the Eurocentrism of Ghana's elite as the expression of a misanthrope's disapproval of people in general." He then adds that "S. A. Gakwandi, for instance, seems to have misunderstood the basic thrust of Armah's anger. Where the novelist condemns the elite's active participation in the neocolonial complex, Gakwandi sees only arrogance and self-righteousness" (1990:55).<sup>2</sup>

When *The Beautiful Ones* opens, the anonymous protagonist is seen sleeping in a bus in the early hours of the morning on his way to work. This motif of the road journey with which the novel opens also closes it, affirming its circular structure. *The Beautiful Ones* is crafted as an odyssey. It is a search for selfhood by the individual and it is also a philosophical novel which seeks to investigate the truth about Man's need to uphold his honesty and integrity in a corrupt world. Neil Lazarus elucidates this view in his "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will" (1987). The critic declares that the Man is in "search for authentic values" but that "the blasted landscape within which the novel's action is staged" makes this impossible (Lazarus, 1987:137-138). Commenting on the search for authentic African values in his seminal article entitled "Phantasy and Repression in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*" (1995), Stewart Crehan contends that "the idea of divided self – the Freudian paradox of a 'dividable individual' – undermines the search

for an authentic African identity, a wholesome subjectivity capable of leadership and rooted in 'Afrocentric' values" (Crehan, 1995:105).

The socio-political milieu of the Man is largely reactionary. In this novel Armah attempts to delineate the preconditions which prevent change. In his *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (1990), Lazarus argues that "The novel is formulated upon the premise that it is only by knowing one's world, by seeing it for what it is, that one can ever genuinely aspire to bring about its revolutionary transformation" (Lazarus, 1990:48) — an interpretation which appears to challenge the traditional African intellectual conviction that Armah has done irreparable harm to Africa's revolutionary aspirations.

The complicated ethnographic-cum-symbolic narrative of the novel is double-voiced. While Armah is preoccupied with criticising the negative attributes of Nkrumah's political career, he is also concerned with finding cures for the corrupt and diseased society. Armah assails the reader with multifarious details and symbols in his attempt to hammer home his nerve-wracking and irrepressible vision of Ghana and the rest of African states as neo-colonies. Armah's Ghana and Africa appear to be on self-destruction course. Ravaged economically, politically, socially and psychologically by its ancient and modern history, Ghana naively pursues a programme of reinforcing ancient and colonial divisions enacted by this foul history. Propelled by some mysterious force and self-destructive rationality, Africa continues to mutilate itself in a hopeless attempt to indulge voracious foreign European masters, who control it by remote action. Every fabric of Armah's Africa is diseased, rotten with accumulated putrescence of endless centuries of tyranny, acquiescence, political incompetence and historical treachery. The corrupt, dispossessed and dependent society, whose citizenry is engaged in a perpetual, perverted, and depersonalized existential striving merely to pit their daily existence against the destructive cycle of Passion Week, staggers into the future.

The most classic passage which reveals Ghana and Africa's neo-colonialism is Armah's depiction of how the old colonial trading houses presumed to have been taken over by the "sons of the [new independent] nation" (pp. 9-10) are still controlled by the former colonial masters. Using the Man as the focalizer, Armah exposes the fact that postcolonial Africa is a puppet dancing to the tune played by the distant Euro-American financial hegemony:

He passed by the U.T.C., the G.N.T.C., the U.A.C., and the French C.F.A.O. The shops had been there all the time, as far back as he could remember. The G.N.T.C., of course, was regarded as a new thing, but only the name had really changed with Independence. The shop had always been there, and in the old days it had belonged to a rich Greek and was known by his name, A. G. LEVENTIS. So in a way the thing was new. Yet the stories that were sometimes heard about it were not stories of something young and vigorous, but the same old stories of money changing hands and throats getting moistened and palms greased. Only this time if the old stories aroused any anger, there was nowhere for it to go. The sons of the nation were now in charge, after all. How completely the new thing took after the old. (pp. 9-10)

Armah suggests that old historical follies and political corruption of the past continue to co-exist in new perverted forms in postcolonial Africa. There is a perception that colonial Africa was better than the postcolonial Africa, for in colonial Africa the aggrieved party could go to nationalist leaders fighting for freedom for redress whereas in postcolonial Africa, “there was nowhere for it [sic] to go”. Armah portrays the elite as depraved and cynical men wallowing in the filth of centuries of cumulative betrayal and bootlicking. Commenting on how the old decay and political corruption embraces the new order in extreme rottenness, Lazarus asserts that “The new seems to have taken after the old so thoroughly, and in such indecent haste, that it is as though the old had never gone away at all” (Lazarus, 1987:140). The novel suggests that it is the filth and wretchedness of the society created by the “new men of substance” that has created the poverty and the wreckage of the African populace in the streets of Africa. The opulence of the African elite is stolen from the poverty-stricken and disenfranchised populace. Armah repeatedly insists that nationalist postcolonial African leaders are nothing but manipulators of perverted ancient political power. The attainment of independence, *The Beautiful Ones* contends, has given Africa not independence but only “a change of embezzlers and a change of the hunters and the hunted” (p. 162). Armah links the corruption of ancient chiefs to that of postcolonial leadership, thus underpinning the thematic unity of his novels. This view is confirmed by the Man’s reference to Koomson’s corpulent and fat physique: “The man, when he shook [Koomson’s] hands, was again amazed at the flabby softness of the hand ... And yet these were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with the ancestral softness of chiefs who had sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruits of the trade” (p.131). This image is structured around “softness” and the slave factor kings of ancient Africa – a creative ploy which reaches its zenith in *Two Thousand Seasons* and is replayed in *The Healers* and *Fragments*



Armah magnifies the enormity of Africa's moral political bankruptcy by insisting that there was a real promise of revolutionary transformation during the beginning of the decolonizing era – a hope which has turned with indecent haste into a monumental betrayal. The Teacher, the philosophical voice in the novel and the Man's guide, articulates the potential for revolutionary change. With the detachment of a guru, the Teacher asserts that "we were ready for big and beautiful things" (p.81) and that "the promise was so beautiful. Even those who were too young to understand it all knew that at last something good was being born. We were not deceived about that" (p. 85). Margaret Folarin in her article entitled "An Additional Comment on Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1971) illuminates this promise. Folarin writes: "What he [Nkrumah] advocates is virtually an ideal republic where men work as equals for the benefit of each other and not just for themselves (Folarin, 1971:121). Kwame Nkrumah, "the Verandah Boy"<sup>3</sup>, was the symbol of this newborn expectation and of the great dreams of the expected birth of FREEDOM – a birth which turns out to be a heretical birth through the latrine hole at the close of the novel. Nkrumah outsmarted the United Gold Coast Convention political party (UGCC) led by the renowned lawyer and writer, Dr. J. B. Danquah and Dr Kofi A. Busia – a political party which Nkrumah worked for as the General Secretary. Two years later, on 12 June 1949, Nkrumah broke away and formed his own Convention People's Party (CPP), which won independence for Ghana in 1957 (George B.N. Ayittey, 1992:160-168)<sup>4</sup> – a political history which forms the backdrop of Armah's novels and which Armah manipulates in *The Beautiful Ones*.

Armah portrays Nkrumah, "the Verandah Boy", as a political leader with unique qualities. But this glorified portrait of Nkrumah is confined to the decolonizing years only and the Nkrumah of postcolonial Ghana was a depraved and tainted man, whose tyranny is well-known. The old Nkrumah was a grassroot popular hero, "a man of the people", to adopt the title of Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966). *The Beautiful Ones* paints an idealized picture of Nkrumah's public image – a romanticized portrait which the text stresses by manipulating various creative ploys. His political speeches are described as being without self-interest and are said to be in harmony with the mood of the masses:

'I have come to you. And you can see that I have nothing in my hands. A few here know where I live. Not much is there. And even what is there is not my own. It is the kindness of a woman [Maanan], one of you now here. Before she saw me

I did what we all do, and slept on other people's verandas. It is the truth, so why should I feel ashamed when proud men look down and say "veranda boy"? I am not ashamed of my poverty. There is nothing shameful in it. But slavery .... How long ....

'Alone, I am nothing. I have nothing. We have power. But we will never know it; we will never see it work. Unless we choose to come together to make it work. Let us come together .... Let us .... Freedom .... Freeeeeeeeedom!' (p.87)

The passage above exploits details of Nkrumah's heroic rise from nothingness to an unprecedented height of political fame and glory. His self-conscious posture of humility and poverty identifies him with the masses. Armah makes reference to "proud men [who] looked down" on Nkrumah and labels him "veranda boy". As Lazarus points out "Nkrumah is thus presented as a leader who captured the people's hearts and minds by speaking to them, without patronization, about their responsibility to free themselves, ... their strength, solidarity, and action" (Lazarus, 1987:143-144). This deified image of Nkrumah is the fundamental underlying reason why Armah portrays the degeneration of Nkrumah's initial promise during the epoch of independence as something sickening, something more abnormally disgusting and absurd than any ordinary political betrayal. The "proud men" referred to above in the cited passage are the old middle class elite comprising of lawyers and merchants led by Dr. Danquah. As the Teacher, the symbol of the philosophical dialectical voice in the work reveals, "It was simple. He [Nkrumah] was good when he had to speak to us, and liked to be with us" (p. 88). Nkrumah certainly won the genuine approval of the populace during the period of decolonization.

In portraying Nkrumah, Armah goes to a great lengths to unravel the class differences between Nkrumah and his party cadres on the one hand and the old middle class elite on the other. The novelist describes the latter as members of a political class that had achieved its venerable position by collaborating with the colonial masters and displaying an abject fawning slave behaviour. Armah presents them as Black Englishmen who belonged to a small class of sycophants "trying at all points to be the dark ghost of a European" (p. 81). Armah continues his vilification of the old elite of lawyers and traders by describing them contemptuously as:

... black men hugging new paunches scrambling to ask the white man to welcome them onto our backs ... they came like men already grown fat and cynical with the eating of centuries of power they never struggled for, old before they had even been born into power, and ready only for the grave. They were lawyers before,

something growing greasy on the troubles of people who worked the land, but now they were out to be our saviors. Their brothers and friends were merchants eating what was left in the teeth of the white men with their companies. They too came to speak of salvation. Our masters were [black] white men ... (p.81).

In response to this negative portrayal of the old elite of lawyers and merchants, Gakwandi complains that "The novel dismisses the black elites as slaves of the colonial boss and their only ambition to take over the privileges of their former masters" (Gakwandi, 1977:91). Nkosi answers the Ugandan critic with "I dare say many will find nothing essentially wrong with such a picture of the modern elite in Africa" (Nkosi, 1981:67) – a critical retort I endorse. At issue here is the humble and low-keyed stance Nkrumah adopted in his political speeches and how this had ushered him into power, while the pompous old middle class elite was rejected by the masses.

Armah initiates his historical reconstruction of the events following the World War II Ghana's political history. He insists that the political aspirations of the old nationalist elite of lawyers and merchants ended in nothing because the masses repudiated them. Armah repeatedly maintains that instead of the expected respect, dignity and leadership "the walking parodies of England" hoped to be conferred upon them by the masses, they were rewarded with sneers and anger. We are told that they failed to understand this turn of events and neither were they capable of changing the course of the post-war political turmoil. In the novelist's own words, "They were not able in the end to understand the people's unbelief" (p. 81). Armah writes:

How could they understand that even those who have not been anywhere know that the black man who has spent his life from himself into whiteness has no power if the white master gives him none? How were these leaders to know that while they were climbing up to shit in their people's face, their people had seen their arseholes and drawn away in disgusted laughter? We knew then, and we know now, that the only real power the black man can have will come from black people. We know also that we were the people to whom these oily men were looking for their support. Only did they not know this. In their minds it was some great favor they were doing us, coming to speak to us in words designed not tell us anything about ourselves, but to press into our minds the weight of things coming from above. They came hours late when we had been standing in the sun waiting to hear what they had to say, and they came with nothing but borrowed words they themselves had not finished understanding, and men felt like sleepers awakened only to hear an idiot's drooling tale. (pp. 81-82)

The premise that the dispossessed masses of Ghana contemptuously ostracized the old nationalist elite of lawyers and merchants is essential to the atmosphere of the novel. The suggestion is that the masses were not naive but were endowed with unusual and heightened native wit and political consciousness. What Armah is straining to convey is the view that the masses were at the crossroad of political development – a transitional stage in which the African populace is on the road to finding and testing its strengths and weaknesses. They were in the embryonic stage in which they investigated processes dealing with shaping their own destiny. These are not all the implications of the electorate's rejection of the greasy old elite. Referring to the middle class elite's political speeches as "borrowed words they themselves ... did not understand" and dismissing disdainfully their speeches as "an idiot's drooling tale" underscore the intensity of the disgust the masses or Armah felt for the old elite during the era of decolonization.

The author in *The Beautiful Ones* hypothesizes that the repudiation of the old middle class elite paved the way for Nkrumah's political career. We see this in the fact that "the Verandah Boy" was politically mature enough to exploit the leadership crisis effectively and to replace the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) with his Convention People's Party (CPP). This was the political coup which ushered him and his party to power in 1951 when he became a Leader of Government Business in the colonial legislature. Nkrumah explained the ideological reason behind his successful take-over of power from the old elite: "according to Nkrumah, 'a middle class elite, without the battering ram of the illiterate masses, can never hope to smash the forces of colonialism'" (Cited in Rolf Italiaander, 1961: 242).<sup>5</sup>

Armah eloquently argues that the spirit of euphoria which Nkrumah signified during the period of decolonization was ironically subverted and betrayed by "the Verandah Boy" himself when freedom had been attained. Armah castigates the entire CPP leadership for having disappointed the peoples of Ghana and Africa in their revolutionary aspirations. In Armah's view, it was the Convention People's Party, under the leadership of Nkrumah, which lit the fire of political agitation in the hearts of the masses, educated them on new mass political tactics, organized them, taught them how to harness political power effectively in order to topple the vicious forces of colonialism and imperialism, and shaped them into an invincible political movement. But to the utter dismay of the people, Nkrumah and his party betrayed the masses by converting themselves into "new embezzlers and eaters of crumbs" from the table of their former colonial masters just

as the old middle class elite and the ancient chiefs had done. By exploiting the Teacher as a political moral sieve, Armah conveys the importance of Nkrumah's political career as a potent backdrop of Ghana's political history to the reader:

The beauty was in the waking of the powerless. Is it always to be true that it is impossible to have things strong and at the same time beautiful? The famished men need not stay famished. But to gorge themselves in this heartbreaking way, consuming, utterly destroying the common promise in their greed, was that ever necessary? (p. 85).

Armah exploits here the image of eating in traditional literature – “to gorge themselves in this heartbreaking way, consuming, utterly destroying the common promise in their greed”. I must add that this ritual motif resurfaces in *The Healers* when the author depicts Ababio's voracious greed for political power by treating it as insatiable consumption of food. Like offering and eating *kola* nut in traditional rituals, which has been perverted in the novel to represent corruption as symbolized by eating bribes, Nkrumah and his henchmen had obscenely degenerated into corrupt men. Since Nkrumah and his lieutenants have become irredeemably tainted and corrupt, they destroy the rosy political promises which were made to the masses during the decolonizing years. Armah is not content to translate into fictional realism the CPP's failure to lead the people of Ghana out of the wasteland of colonial tyranny. But rather, the failure is portrayed as an act of monstrous historic betrayal:

Here we have had a kind of movement that should make even good stomachs go sick. What is painful to the thinking mind is not movement itself, but the dizzying speed of it. It is that which has been horrible. Unnatural, I would have said, I had not stopped myself with asking, unnatural according to what kind of nature? ...How horribly rapid everything has been, from the days when men were not ashamed to talk of souls and suffering and hope, to these low days of smiles that will never again be sly enough to hide the knowledge of betrayal and deceit. There is something of an irresistible horror in such quick decay. (p. 62)

Nkrumah's rite of passage from “the Verandah Boy” to “the Show Boy” has been likened to that of a political ruler suffering from mental disorder marked by a breakdown in relation between thought, feeling, and action. This mental breakdown is said to be frequently accompanied by delusions and retreat from social life. According to the anonymous writer of “Letter from Ghana” (1967:34), Nkrumah politically acted like an insane ruler, who embodied in his person the contrary



qualities of “the Verandah Boy”, which represents his humane attributes, and the antithetical persona of “the Show Boy”, that symbolizes his depraved, ostentatious, flamboyant and dictatorial personality. What Armah insists on again and again is that it is not the historic betrayal but the “irresistible horror in such quick decay”— the dizzying speed of monstrous rottenness and corruption which lay at the root of the disgusting degeneration of Nkrumah’s political career and that of his party as a whole. Drawing on the perceptions of the nameless writer of “Letter from Ghana” (1967), Lazarus reports that “Armah could have argued that Nkrumah’s career involved nothing more than the progressive ‘degeneration of the dedicated Verandah Boy to the ostentatious Show Boy and finally to the haughty Old Man dispensing patronage to an increasingly narrow circle of personal friends and sycophants’” (1967:35).

Unlike the nameless author of “Letter from Ghana” (1967), Armah’s central didactic purpose is to sketch the ethical ramifications and to draw the attention of Nkrumah’s mass followers to the ruler’s moral abyss in order to locate the dissolution of Nkrumahism within the wider context of African historiography and history. I would argue that it is solely for this creative intent that practically all Armah’s speculations concerning Nkrumah and his henchmen are expressed in dystopian and excretory metaphors that unambiguously incorporate moral dialectics. These creative devices include rationalizations which are amplified through the novelist’s ingenious and eclectic manipulation of multi-dimensional narrative strategies such as using the Teacher as a moral filter, lucid authorial comments and dense symbolic patterning. Significantly, the Teacher muses about how within a short period of time the CPP politicians managed to create a revolutionary climate which they themselves subsequently destroyed totally:

True, I used to see a lot of hope. I saw men tear down the veils behind which the truth had been hidden. But then the same men, when they have power in their hands at last, began to find the veils useful. They made many more. Life has not changed. Only some people have been growing, becoming different, that is all. After a youth spent fighting the white man, why should not the president discover as he grows older that his real desire has been to be like the white governor himself, to live above all the blackness in the big old slave castle? And the men around him, why not? What stops them sending their loved children to kindergartens in Europe? And if the little men around the big men can send their children to new international schools, why not? That is all anyone here ever struggles for: to be nearer the white man. All the shouting against the white men was not hate. It was love. Twisted, but love all the same. Just look around you and you will see it even now. Especially now. (p. 92)

Koomson, the symbol of “new” Ghana, enjoys an opulent lifestyle which evokes that of Africa’s colonial middle class elite and by extension the lifestyle of the fabulous ancient kings who are virulently vilified in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. This view is powerfully sustained by the passage: “He lives in a way that is far more painful to see than the way the white men have always lived here .... There is no difference then. No difference at all between the white men and their apes, the lawyers and the merchants, and now the apes of the apes, our Party men” (p. 89). As Lazarus puts it, the Nkrumahists “have lately become indistinguishable from the pre-independence elite, who never bore about them the stamp of sincerity in the first place” (Lazarus, 1990:53).

Armah argues that the only people who profit from independence are the Africans who have consciously or unconsciously collaborated with the departing colonial masters. This premise suggests that the road to power leads only to addiction to European ethos and closeness to the white man. Just like the colonial old middle class elite of lawyers and merchants who devoted their lives to “fleeing from [themselves] ... into whiteness” (p. 82), Nkrumah and his political party, having won power, moved in to replace the white men and lived in the posh European-designed mansions, vacated by the departing colonizers. By this action, the text suggests, they managed to live “above all blackness” (p. 92). It, therefore, comes as no surprise that Koomson, who strains to look like and live like a European, names his daughter “Princess”—a name which evokes the lifestyle of the English royalty. Little Princess is a walking parody of a European child. We are told that the little girl exhibits “the fearless, direct look of a white child and calls her father “Daddy” (p.144). It must be pointed out that Armah’s satiric target does not isolate Nkrumah alone for vilification but includes the whole social order and, by extension the entire African Continent. This view seems to be borne by Ben Obumselu’s comment in his essay, “Marx, Politics and the African Novel” (1973). He writes: “In characterising the people in general as prisoners of a nightmare in which they are ‘dwarfs unable to run away and little insects caught in endless pools (p. 2)’, Armah glances disapprovingly at the vicious social system ” (Obumselu, 1973:113).

By exploiting the Man as the witness narrator who experiences the events and filters them through his moral consciousness, Armah presents the Black Africans’ obsessive desire to escape the burden of being black. Far from the communal dirt and mud, the Man describes the plush Estate houses which used to be reserved for whites only during the heydays of colonialism. The Man

notices that the palatial houses look almost the same as they had always done during the colonial era, except for few changes – the compulsive Anglicization of indigenous African surnames:

Not everything was entirely the same .... Here and there the names had changed. True, there were very few black names of black men, but the places by the roadside had enough names of black men with white souls and names trying mightily to be white. In the forest of white men's names, there were signs that said almost aloud: here lives a black imitator. MILLS-HAYFORD ... PLANGE-BANNERMAN ... ATTOH-WHITE ... KUNTU-BLANKSON. Others that must have been keeping their white neighbours laughing even harder in their homes. ACROMOND ... what Ghanaian name could that have been in the beginning, before its Civil Servant owner rushed to civilize it, giving it something like the sound of a mastername. GRANTSON ... more and more incredible they are getting. There is someone calling himself FENTNGSON in this wide world, and also a man called BINFUL. (p. 126)

The Black African's addiction to the European ethos – a cultural malady which takes the form of either pathological addiction to European consumer practices, adopting Christian names or Anglicizing indigenous surnames and afflicts the entire African Continent – is being isolated here for condemnation. The Anglicization of Ghanaian surnames is very prevalent among the Fantes of Ghana who live on the coast and were the first indigenous tribe to come in contact with the European colonizers as early as 1482. How Armah has succeeded in using details of colonial history of the old middle class elite in reinforcing his thematic concern is revealed by this citation. In fact the authorial intrusions in the novel brilliantly synthesize this profusion of diverse details by sieving them through the network of the author's ethical consciousness.

In *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah presents us with a creative vision of a small and powerful political elite which imposes itself and its "ideology of the gleam" on the poverty-stricken masses. Hence the novelist introduces the reader to "the gleam" from the beginning of the work. We are introduced to the gleam which largely comes to symbolize various manifestations of political and moral corruption which rule Armah's depraved world through the eyes of the Man. The Atlantic-Caprice Hotel of Takoradi (the city in which the action of the tale is set) – a name parodied from the Atlantic Hotel in the harbour city of Takoradi – epitomizes the gleaming physical structure of the gleam, the political corruption which cripples Armah's world:

On top of the hill [Yensua Hill], commanding it just as it commended the scene below, its sheer, flat, multistoried side an insulting white in the concentrated gleam of the hotel's spotlights, towered the useless structure of the Atlantic-Caprice. Sometimes it seemed as if the huge building had been put there for a purpose, like that of attracting to itself all the massive anger of a people in pain. But then, if there were any angry ones at all these days, they were most certainly feeling the loneliness of mourners at a festival of crazy joy. Perhaps then the purpose of this white thing was to draw onto itself the love of a people hungry for just something such as this. The gleam, in moments of honesty, had a power to produce a disturbing ambiguity within. It would be good to say that the gleam never did attract. It would be good, but it would be far from the truth. And something terrible was happening as time went on. It was getting harder and harder to tell whether the gleam repelled more that it attracted, attracted more that it repelled, or just did both at once in one disgustingly confused feeling all the time these heavy days. (p. 10)

The Atlantic-Caprice not only symbolizes European ways and opulence but also the nerve centre of all vestiges of power: all those who have successfully embraced the gleam and have become obscenely wealthy go to the Atlantic-Caprice. In his article "Symbol and Meaning in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*" (1975), Ogungbesan explicates the symbolic significance of the hotel in Armah's exposé. The Nigerian critic posits that "All roads lead to the Atlantic Caprice. Situated on the hill, the hotel symbolizes a possibility to which all may aspire, but which only a few can attain – and those inevitably by corrupt means – because their immoral society permits no alternatives" (Ogungbesan, 1975:96). Thus the gleam produces a disturbing ambiguity in incorruptible people because though the gleam is attractive, the only way of achieving the opulent lifestyle it advocates is by corruption – a road to materialism and luxury which is ethically repulsive. In Armah's own words: "There would always be only one way for the young to reach the gleam. Cutting corners, eating the fruit of fraud" (p.95). The possibility of success as evoked by the brilliance of the gleaming splendour of the hotel repeatedly assails the thoughts and the feelings of the destitute masses who cannot resist the attraction of the gleam – the symbol of power, opulence, prestige and the ideology of being seen as a European.

The gleam becomes the fulcrum around which every function of the society revolves. In the words of Lazarus, "The society has become fetishistic in its obsession with ostentation and gratuitous consumption and its eschewal to all principles except those related to materialism and accumulation" (Lazarus, 1990:57). The over-furnished palace of Koomson – a house filled with a plethora of quaint gleaming European objects – sustains this critical formulation. We are told

that “The sitting room was cut off by a long, high frame, beautifully polished, also with shelves all covered with small, intricate objects that must come from foreign lands, though of what use they were the man could not decide”. The worthless profusion of European artifacts include “two large contraptions whose outsides were of highly polished wood”; an “amazingly large” “radio set”; “five deep, soft chairs, all with red cushions and a carpet on the noiseless floor”; and “two shiny things: a silver box and a small toy-like pistol” (p. 146). The list of the bizarre objects Koomson has surrounded himself with is not only self-consciously selected for their colourful brilliance which flaunts his achievement of the ideology of the gleam, but is also designed to underscore Africa’s bondage to European consumerism. What is emphasized here is more than merely a phony awareness of the individual’s predicament. Though the whole populace, with the exception of Maanan, Kofi Billy, the Teacher and the Man, has embraced the principles of the gleam ideology, only a minute number of the people has succeeded in attaining the life of opulence advocated by the gleam.

Right from the beginning of the novel, Armah meticulously charts the multi-dimensional reaches of the corruption which cripples the world in *The Beautiful Ones*. Besides this the opening pages also exploit very suggestively a dystopian metaphor which underpins the wide-spread corruption that engulfs this foul state. The decrepit bus whose “confused rattle had given place to endless spastic shudder, as if its pieces were held together by too much rust ever to fall completely apart” (p. 1) represents the corrupt newly independent state of Ghana in particular and Africa in general. The conductor who is unaffected to foul smells is the Nkrumahist politician – a sadistic statesman who is fond of victimizing the powerless masses. We are told that the conductor is counting his daily takings and that he is fascinated by a brand new cedi: in a rather addictive way, he lifts the cedi note to his nose and smells it: “It was a most unexpected smell for something so new to have: it was a very old smell, very strong, and so very rotten that the stench of it came with a curious satisfying pleasure” (p.3). The decrepitude of the social bus of state symbolizes the decay and disintegration which exercises a supreme power over the newly independent nation of Ghana. The intimation that the “rust” appears to hold the rotten pieces of the bus from falling apart suggests the paradox that corruption could have a spectre of regeneration operating within its margins. The bus conductor’s uncontrollable desire to smell the cedi note which emits a foul stench reveals the immunity of those who have made the successful leap towards the gleam to its foulness and rottenness.



The basic conclusion to be drawn from the society's fixation for the gleam and the difficulty of attaining this goal is that new options are being pursued in order to embrace the gleam. The novel projects a world in which corruption is so pervasive that it becomes an acceptable way of life. The fact of life which the ideology of the gleam recommends as the only way to achieve one's ambition in this moral wasteland is dishonesty. Those who attempt to live above this corrosive corruption are called "fools" and "cowards". This interpretation is confirmed by the Man's wife, Oyo, whose reaction to his refusal to accept the bribe offered by Amankwa, the corrupt timber contractor goes as follows:

"What were you afraid of then?" ...

"But why should I take it?"

"And why not? When you shook Estella Koomson's hand, was not the perfume that stayed on yours a pleasing thing? Maybe you like this crawling that we do, but I am tired of it. I would like to have someone drive me where I want to go."

"Like Estella Koomson?"

"Yes, like Estella. And why not? Is she more than I?"

"We don't know how she got what she has," the man said.

"And we don't care." The woman's voice had lost its excitement and reverted to its flatness .... "We don't care. Why pretend. Everybody is swimming towards what he wants. Who wants to remain on the beach asking the wind, 'How ... How ... How?'"

.....

"...It is nice. It is clean, the life Estella is getting". (p. 44)

The Man's retort to the last two sentences about the cleanness of the life Estella and Koomson are living exposes the source of corruption and how it comes to be seen by the entire society with the exception of the Teacher and the Man, as an authentic lifestyle: "Some of that kind of cleanness has more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of a garbage dump" (p.44). At the centre of this moral debate is the fact that in real terms Estella and her husband live in a posh house located in a clean neighbourhood, while the Man and his wife, Oyo, live in a ramshackle house with a filthy bucket latrine – a house situated in a location wallowing in dirt and mud. Thus Oyo is right to talk of Estella as living a clean life. Like the rest of the Ghanaians in Nkrumah's Ghana, she is seduced by the glittering external appearances of those who embrace the gleam. Because Oyo is not endowed with full self-knowledge she is unable see through the centuries of veils erected by generations of Africa's rulers to blindfold the masses. The citation also underscores the unbridgeable conflict between the Man and his loved ones: an irreparable family discord which is responsible for his ambivalent attitude towards the gleam, which both repels and

attracts him. The Man has made an unusual discovery: “hard work” and conscientiousness do not lead to progress or count for anything in this amoral world:

Hard work. As if any amount of hard work could ever at this rate bring the self and the loved ones closer to the gleam. How much hard work before a month’s pay would last till the end of the month? ... And food. How long would it take, and how hard the work, before there would be enough food for five, and something left over for chasing after the gleam? Only one way. There would always be only one way for the young to reach the gleam. Cutting corners, eating the fruit of fraud .... That has always been the way the gleam is approached: in one bold, corrupt leap that gives the leaper the power to laugh with contempt at those who still plod on the daily round, stupid, honest, dull, poor, despised, afraid. We shall never arrive. Unless of course, we too take the jump. (pp. 95-96)

In the debilitating world of *The Beautiful Ones* there is only one single compelling goal in life: leaping towards the gleam (corruption): beyond this dog-eat-dog situation and self-destructive pursuit, there is, as the Man reflects, “nothing at all worth spending life’s minutes on” (p.47). The erosion of family values like honesty, veneration, morality, and feeling for loved ones has created a world dominated by fawning slave culture, bootlicking and ruthless exploitation. Cosmic alienation and unrelieved despair rule Armah’s fictional environment. There is overwhelming textual evidence to sustain the view that “only the heroes of the gleam” like the Koomsons, “who [do] not feel like they [are] strangers” (p. 35) in their own homes. This perception underscores the Man’s familial estrangement from his family and the fact that he is no longer regarded as the head of his own household which Koomson can come in any time he likes. Witness, for example, Koomson’s flight into the Man’s house after the coup. This existential isolation from “loved ones” and being a stranger in one’s own home is conveyed by Wright in his article, “Shit and Rust: An African Dystopia” (1990). Wright writes: “Honest men are criminals, ‘loved ones’ become predators and, except for the men in power, home is universally a place to flee from, not retire to” (Wright, 1990:109).

We see in Koomson’s worthless glittering objects that brilliance or light is a potent quality of the gleam. The second characteristic of the gleam, which needs discussion is speed. The successful leapers who have captured the gleam are presented as people who have learnt to drive fast. Hence the pursuit of the gleam entails the notion of fast movement. Ogungbesan illuminates this phenomenon of the gleam: the attribute of dizzying speed as follows: “Usually we see them in

their cars. Their speed is so great that the words 'leap' and 'soar' are used to describe it" (Ogungbesan, 1975:94-95). We are told that Koomson has learnt to drive – an accomplishment which accounts for his opulent lifestyle and the ability to live like a European. The Man's wife, Oyo, demonstrates not only how crucial both the extravagant lifestyle and the ideology of being seen as a European serve as the only road to a successful achievement of the gleam but also how speed and fast driving become an end in themselves leading towards that success. The Man reports the wife's reflection on this speed or fast driving ideology to the Teacher, his mentor as follows:

Teacher, my wife explained to me, step by step, that life was like a lot of roads: long roads, short roads, wide and narrow, steep and level, all sorts of roads. Next, she let me know that human beings were like so many people driving their cars on all these roads. This was the point at which she told me that those who wanted to get far had to learn to drive fast .... Accidents would happen, she told me, but the fear of accidents would never keep men from driving. (58-59)

It is clear that Oyo's reflection on driving cars serves only as an explanation of the gleam ideology. According to Oyo, speed is the kernel of affluent lifestyle which ensures personal enjoyment. She, in a previous dialogue, chides the Man for his refusal to leap towards the gleam like everybody else and declares that she is "tired of ... this crawling we do" (p.44). Oyo is completely seduced by "the blinding gleam of beautiful new houses and the shine of powerful new Mercedes cars" and "the scent of expensive perfumes and the mass of new wig[s]" (p.56) – symbols of Estella and Koomson's luxurious and Eurocentric lifestyle. Oyo's vision of fast driving serves to re-enact and to reinforce the journey motif which opens and closes the novel. Significantly, Oyo perceives the gleam as a promise to better life which is reached only after a hazardous journey. It follows from this schema that those who get there first are the fast drivers and Nkrumahist politicians' unusual rapid decay and corruption (like Koomson's) also signify them as people who have learnt to drive fast.

The Man's cosmic alienation stems from the fact that he does not belong anywhere. The Man seems rather to fall into an abyss between two worlds which battle against each other for supremacy: the insiders versus the outsiders of the gleam or of the corrupt society. This relationship with both worlds makes it near impossible for him to fully collaborate with either.

“After arguments and counter-accusations” (p. 46) which have become the hallmarks of the Man’s family life, the miserable husband goes out into the night in search of answers:

... the night was a dark tunnel so long that out in front and above there never could be any end to it, and to the man walking down it was plain that the lights here and there illuminated nothing so strongly as they did the endless power of the night, easily, softly calling every sleeping thing into itself. Looking all round him the man saw that he was the only thing that had no way of answering the call of the night. His eyes were hurting in their wakefulness, and in this night air that was moist with the water and the salt of the sea nearby, he felt a terrible dryness in his nostrils and in his mouth all the way down into his throat, and his head had grown heavy with too much lightness. Around a street lamp high over the coal tar, insects of the night whirled in a crazy dance, drawn not directly by the night from which they had come, but by the fire of the lamps in it. Their way of meeting the night, and it was all the same in the end. (p. 47)

The “crazy dance” of the insects attracted by the street lamps suggests that, dominated by his inner gaze upon his positive vision of social upliftment and decency, the Man perceives the corrupt world’s pathological chase after the gleam as a futile existential search for an illusory goal. Like the sleeping masses’ hunger for the gleam, the insects are devoted and committed in their preoccupation with the light emitted by the street lamps – shadowy flickerings which are nothing more than the perverted shadows of sunlight. But the crux of the matter is, like the inhabitants of this society, the insects which are seduced and corrupted by appearances do not know the light is not only phony but destructive as well. The link between the insects’ attraction to the bogus light and that of the Koomsons is confirmed by Oyo’s deluded perception that the Koomsons, particularly Estella, live a clean life – which the Man rejects by comparing their lifestyle to the “rottenness” symbolized by “the slime at the bottom of a garbage dump” (p. 44).

One of the focal images of *The Beautiful Ones* is that of the cave extracted from Plato’s *Republic* and the development of the plot appears to manipulate this recurring image eclectically in order to convey another dimension of the gleam. The point which is reinforced by this image is the view that once hooked by the materialism of the gleam, escape is impossible. The kernel of the cave image relates the tale of a visionary who ventures outside “the cavernous darkness” of the cave to the sunlight above and brings the gift of light to the inmates of the cave. Instead of the expected gratitude, they mock him and declare him insane (p. 80). Commenting on the cave image, Wright asserts that “Those who pursue ‘the gleam’ of materialism are, like Plato’s cave dwellers, ‘people

who for ages had seen nothing outside the darkness of their own shadowy forms and had no way of believing that there could be anything else” (Wright, 1989: 211). The dark cave, obviously, represents the corrupt world depicted by the novel and the bringer of light represents the upright people who struggle futilely to transform this morally debilitating society. Like the visionary bringer of light to the cave encapsulated in permanent darkness, the few lone individuals who fight the totalitarian powers of the gleam of materialism and corruption “are rewarded for their pains with ostracism and social obloquy rather than respect and acclaim” (Lazarus, 1987:155). According to Margaret Folarin, “The people in the cave do not live in total darkness. They too pursue a light, but it is the light of a Hades, ‘a gleam’, which appears bright when set in darkness” (Folarin, 1971:118). The myth of Plato’s cave which the Teacher relates to the Man explains “the Ghanaians’ [Africans’] hatred for ‘the bringer of light’, “a story of impenetrable darkness and chains with a deep and cavernous hole” (Collins, 1971:39) – a myth which re-enacts the destiny of the fouled world dominated by the gleam.

The powerlessness induced by the gleam also promotes what might be called the development of pathological violence which is a nascent form of carrier motif: “The anger came out, but it was all victim anger that had to find even weaker victims ...” (p. 69). This “victim anger” is produced into the gleam’s subjects who are aware of their unrelieved agony and anger which they unload on weaker victims. The classic example of this off-loading of the burdens of the pent-up frustrations, unhappiness and cosmic despair on the weaker members of the society is the incident which occurs in the social bus at the opening of the novel. When the decrepit communal bus staggers to a halt in the faint darkness of the dawn, the sleepy passengers file out, leaving the corrupt conductor, who thinks he is alone. The degenerate conductor, who is immune to the stench induced by spiritual rottenness, notices a pair of eyes gazing intently at him while he performs his degrading and immoral-cum-pathological act of inhaling the new cedi’s stinking odour into his nostrils. The discovery of the conductor’s abnormal behaviour by the watcher triggers a series of contradictory behaviour patterns. The watcher is the Man:

A pair of wide open, staring eyes met his. The man was sitting in the very back of the bus, with his body angled forward so that his chin was resting on the back of the seat in front of him, supported by his hands. The eyes frightened the conductor. Even the mere remembered smell of the cedi was, now painful, and the feeling in his armpit had suddenly become cold. Was this the giver turned watcher already? ... Then a savage indignation filled the conductor. For in the soft vibrating

light inside the bus, he saw, running down from the left corner to the watcher's mouth, a stream of the man's spittle. Oozing freely, the boil-like liquid first entangled itself in the fingers of the watcher's left hand, underneath which it spread and touched the rusty metal lining of the seat with a dark sheen, then descended with quiet inevitability down the dirty aged leather of the seat itself, losing itself at last in the depression made by the joint. The watcher was no watcher after all, only a sleeper. (pp. 3-5)

The corrupt conductor is both ashamed and frightened by the thought that the excremental basis of his fraudulent power and personality has been exposed to the watcher. The paralysing fear which grips him when the watcher's eyes gaze into his foul being anticipates Koomson's flatulent terror after the coup. Witness the reversal of power when the conductor realizes that "the watcher" was "only a sleeper". In a status-reversal akin to off-loading his burden of corruption and guilt on the ritual carrier, the Man, the conductor explodes with a virulent fury and dismisses the Man as a "bloodyfucking sonofabitch. Article of no commercial value" (p. 6). As if this transfer of pathological anger and frustrations induced by the gleam to weaker victims of the society is not enough, as the Man leaves the bus after being driven from it by the conductor, the driver assails him with yellow sputum from his clogged chest. The heaps of insult showered on him – "Uncircumcised baboon ... Moron of a frog" (p. 9) – by the driver of a taxi which almost runs the Man over further heightens the Man's status both as a butt of ridicule and as a ritual carrier. Thus the powerless Man begins his journey of life as a ritual carrier who bears the accumulated moral and historical pollutants of his society – a theme we shall come back to when we scrutinize the end of the Man's existential absurd odyssey.

The dumping of others' disappointment at the corrupt system on the Man is also sustained by the result of the boat deal between Koomson and Oyo and her mother: a deal which the Man opposes but is ignored as usual. But when Koomson appropriates the profit and rewards the Man's wife and mother-in-law with the occasional supply of miserable fish, Oyo's mother, who now realizes that Koomson has no intention of sharing the profits from the venture with her and Oyo, fails to confront Koomson. Instead, she heaps insults at the Man as carrier source for the release of her anger and frustrations:

Even the old woman seemed gradually to have resigned herself to the knowledge that what Koomson had come offering her was not the rainbow that would forever end the darkness of her life and the daughter's life. This realization did not, indeed,



end her bitterness towards the man. It deepened it, as if in some ultimate way the old woman had no doubt at all that the man had willed her disappointment. The man, for his part, was content to note again how unwilling the powerless became when there was a call for them to resent the powerful. (p. 152)

Thus this incident also goes to prove the Man's status as a carrier motif. Also crucial is Oyo's mother's final awareness that no profit can be made from the crooked boat deal with Koomson since the degenerate party man is not willing to share the proceeds with her and Oyo. As a butt of ridicule and the symbol of ritual carrier, the Man is attacked by his mother-in-law. Thus the old woman finds it hopeless to attack Koomson for her inability to eat the ripe fruit of the fraudulent boat enterprise because the victims of this wasteland do not have the capacity to reproach the heroes of the gleam for their immoral activities. The Man's status as a ritual carrier is reinforced by her decision to blame him though he is in no way responsible for the frustration of her attempt to leap towards the gleam in order to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle. In his essay, "Motivation and Motif" (1985), Wright affirms the carrier status of the Man when he reports that "The man becomes the metaphorical carrier of the guilt-probing disease of integrity which causes the Koomsons to regard him not only as invisible and inaudible – he is 'invisible man of the shadows' (p. 37) whom they are afraid to see or hear – but also as untouchable" (Wright, 1985:121). The most pervasive figure who symbolizes the society's accumulated moral and political mountains of filth which needs to be expelled from the community is Koomson. Wright has argued that "More interested in his object-status as ritual property, Armah reductively depersonalizes Koomson into the symbolic dirt-mound or wooden figurine in the carrier's model canoe (Wright, 1989:114): the man leads him across a landscape of 'stumps and holes and mounds' and the politician is even described as 'walking stiffly', momentarily rigid', and 'like some wooden thing'" (pp. 170-171).

At the close of the tale, the novel's ritualistic carrier motif, which teems in the novel's metaphoric and dystopian matrix, initiates a take-over of the control of the central thrust of the novel, and the relationships between the human and the ethnographical-ritual ramifications become increasingly apparent. The fugitive Joe Koomson emerges as an embodiment of constipation: a sack of putrid body excretions to be evacuated down the country's latrine hole – a symbolic phenomenon displaying all the fantastic realistic embodiment of the African oral tradition. Koomson is submitted to a devastating status-reversal when he obscenely displays a cacophony of "thundering

through the belly and guts”, “flatulent fear”, “the rich stench of menstrual blood”, and disgusting excremental “smell waves” (p. 163), which draws the long overdue self-illuminating remark from the Man’s wife, Oyo. The woman who has been an eternal tormentor of her husband says that “I am glad you never became like him” (p. 165) – an admission which serves to pave the way towards a better relationship between the Man and his wife. Richard Niemi confirms this critical perception when he points out in his article, “Will The Beautiful Ones Ever Be Born?” (1971), that “Before the two [Koomson and the Man] leave the man’s house for the harbor, he has the satisfaction of finding that Oyo has had a veil lifted from her eyes” (Niemi, 1971:22-23). The latrine hole incident suggests that Koomson has become a ritual and morally polluted matter – a non-living or dead weight which must be “pushed, pulled, held, rammed, gently drawn, steered by its carrier who, after partly denuding the contamination source during the latrine passage, no longer troubles to avoid contagion by keeping ‘a fruitless distance between himself and the other’” (p.163) (Wright, 1989:115).

The Man’s carrier-induced expulsion of the tainted Koomson from the society and his unloading of him into the ritual dunghill, the sea, to which night-soil men in most towns in colonial Gold Coast dumped their burdens of shit, links the Man to the brotherhood of stigmatized and ostracized latrine carriers. That the sea itself is not pure is confirmed by Wright’s assertion that “the sea itself a pile of pollution at the end of the latrine circuit and the death cycle of the body” (Wright, 1989:122). In Armah’s own words “the dark water of the night sea looked thick and viscous, almost solid” (p. 176). The perception that the Man has a stigmatised bond with the latrine man because both figures function as agents of cleansing the polluted matter and moral offences from society is endorsed by the fact that as the Man bears his burden of the societal pollutants, Koomson, he retraces the latrine man’s winding circuit in order to evade detection: “They kept to little lanes between the walls around people’s houses, going past the many latrine holes and their little gutters running with the dark liquid, old mixtures of piss and shit. They were walking along the latrine man’s circuit through life” (p. 170). Significantly, Koomson becomes accumulated shit which is the produce of the ostentatious consumption of Ghana’s resources, the end result of the gleam, about to be carried away by the supreme national latrine man, the Man, and dumped in the sea. The moral to be drawn from this wasteland existence is, to borrow from Wright, “The excrementalizing of almost everything by this impersonal totalitarian rhetoric

induces a fatalistic acceptance of corruption as the total condition of reality, before which individual honesty must wearily capitulate” (Wright, 1989:122).

Armah’s treatment of the carrier motif is significantly different from that of other writers from West Africa. In the traditional concept of the motif, the ritual expulsion of the year’s pollutants ushers in celebration and regeneration. As the Man observes at a road block where the driver of the new mini bus on a long journey is forced to bribe a policeman – an observation that suggests that the coup has brought about no new changes and that the gleam is still in control – Armah’s exploitation of the carrier motif does not amount to a revolutionary transformation of the foul society. Though the symbolic removal of the Koomsons and Nkrumahs appears as one of “the things in the present which would prepare the way for the “future goodness”, this ray of hope is dashed by the fact that new embezzlers have already replaced the old ones who have just been evacuated.

The ideology of the gleam has not only foisted its authority upon Armah’s world it has also succeeded in projecting itself as the ultimate reality. Its power and success are so awesome that attempts to resist its ramifications – together with its attendant gaudy, visible and sterling virtues – are seen as a deviation from the normal natural order. A totalitarian imposition of the tenets of the gleam upon this decayed world seems to be its central objective. This viewpoint is potently conveyed by the following passage:

Was there not some proverb that said the green fruit was healthy, but healthy only for its brief self? That the only new life there ever is comes from seeds feeding on their own rotten fruit? What then, was the fruit that refused to lose its acid and its greenness? What monstrous fruit was it that could find the end of its life in the struggle against sweetness and corruption? (p. 145)

It appears that now that the gleam has achieved a monolithic image, it is bent upon destroying all forms of resistance to its dominance. The sentence, “the only new life there ever is comes from seeds feeding on their own rotten fruit” seems to imply that rot and decay, though they entail corruption and decadence, are the only natural processes through which rebirth and regeneration can occur. The rationale to draw from this is that the gleam is recommending itself as the only viable alternative to resistance and revolutionary transformation. In reality, this is a premise which is nothing but a political and ideological ruse employed by the heroes of the gleam. As Jean

Solomon indicates in her “A Commentary on Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*”(1974) “Corruption has become natural to Ghana [and we might add, to the rest of Africa] and as polish cannot hinder organic rot, so no attempt at cleanliness will hinder moral rot” (Solomon, 1974:27). The other view Armah strains to convey is the vision that all attempts to stamp out decay and rot prove futile. This view is brilliantly captured by the banister passage. In Armah’s own words, we are told that “The wood underneath would win and win till the end of time ... it was in the nature of the wood to rot with age” (p.12). In his PhD thesis William A. Walker confirms this critical interpretation when he asserts that “The author indicates that efforts to halt decay are futile since all things that live are subject to eventual, inevitable decay” (Walker, 1975:91).

The image of the “monstrous fruit” evokes the recurrent images and metaphors which suggest that rot and decay are natural processes of death and rebirth. Two such recurring images manipulate and compare the ageing and the decaying of our teeth with eating and defecation. We are told that the sparkling white teeth of the young grow with age and become yellow, murky, and fall off leaving the mouth hollow and toothless. Armah’s narrator adds that this “rot, decay, putrescence” heralds “the smell of approaching death” (p. 85). The surface implication of this narrative seems to suggest that Nkrumah’s corrupt regime is being exonerated from its betrayal of the masses since decay of natural processes and institutions are perceived to be normal and natural. Gareth Griffiths explains the inevitability of ageing and rot in the nature of things when he asserts that “Filth is a natural and necessary condition of life. Ordure is life’s end-product and the mulch from which fresh life springs” (Griffiths, 1972:68). But the coda to this thesis is Armah’s castigation of the unusual dizzying speed with which African states and the rosy dreams that ushered in Uhuru are transformed into a world wallowing in endemic ostentatious living, widespread decay, industrial stagnation and political corruption. This unnatural speed of decay of institutions of state naturally echoes the speed of the gleam. Africa, according to the text, is in an obscene hurry to embrace accumulated, marvellous political rottenness stretching from the ancient times through the colonial era to postcolonial Africa. The other image of decay re-enacts the pervasive image of ingestion-evacuation cycle. Like the symbols of the “monstrous fruit” and the ageing and the rot of the white teeth of the young, we are told that the beautiful and tasty food we eat becomes the smelly shit we defecate (p.85). The different reactions of the two principal characters, the Teacher and the Man, to the destructive power of the gleam need to be probed.

The Teacher, the enemy of the gleam, like his friend, the Man, is paralysed by unrelieved despair and loneliness, and worst of all, ostracized by the subjects of the world ruled by the gleam. The Teacher is overwhelmed by a compulsive and intricate dialectical investigation of how man can live above the debilitating effects of the gleam, while the Man is oppressed by vacillation and an abysmal lack of self-confidence. To live above the symptoms and the cravings for the gleam, the Teacher has destroyed all connections with his relatives, but in spite of these alienating measures to purge himself from the trappings of the ideology of the materialism of the gleam, he is surprised to notice that the gleam exerts an enormous influence on his life. He has chosen a lifestyle he calls "my half-life of loneliness" (p. 56), an existence which is a negation of life itself. The Man, on the other hand, is not a hermit like his mentor, the Teacher, because he still has a wife, Oyo, and three children to shelter and to feed. In spite of this, his resistance to the gleam annihilates him. The gleam compels the Man to perceive himself as a criminal in a society in which the citizens perpetrate ghastly offences with impunity in broad day light while those who strive to uphold their integrity and have done no wrong are branded law-breakers and ostracized. Relating his constant arguments and counter-accusations with Oyo, the Man tells the Teacher: "I feel like a criminal. Often these days I find myself thinking of something sudden I could do to redeem myself in their eyes. Then I sit down and ask myself what I have done wrong, and there is really nothing" (p. 54). The Man's perception of being a criminal is elucidated by Leslie L. Fenton in her article entitled "Symbolism and Theme in Peter's *The Second Round* and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*" (1973). Fenton argues that "In his [the Man's] efforts to resist the corruption all around him, he not only feels agonizingly isolated, but, paradoxically, he feels *himself* to be the criminal, rather than those who are perpetrating the crimes" (1973:86).

These reflections, however, are not articulate enough and neither do they help the Man in his daily striving against the all-consuming power of the gleam. Particularly, his rationalizations on the gleam do nothing to ward off the endless accusations from loved ones or defend his integrity against the avalanche of dreams and expectations of loved ones. Significantly, there is no reasonable excuse or explanation that he could offer the worshippers of the gleam, who see his moral integrity as stupidity, depravity, or timidity. Thus, the Man is continually forced to regard his self-integrity as villainous in the eyes of his foul world. In the words of Richard Priebe, "the man' confronts the futility of being good in a corrupt world" (Priebe, 1976:103). And we might

add that although it is the society which is off course, the few upright central characters think it is they who are estranged from the universal fountain of moral ethics:

The man was left alone with thoughts of the easy slide and how everything said there was something miserable, something unspeakably dishonest about a man who refused to take and to give what everyone around was busy taking and giving: something unnatural, something very cruel, something that was criminal, for who but a criminal could be left with such a feeling of loneliness? (pp. 31-32)

The fact that the Man is often tantalized by the glistening gleam symbolizing all the manifestations of moral and political corruption reinforces his conviction that he is a criminal or a political saboteur. Unlike the Teacher, he is caught in the middle between the corrupt world and the world of those who resist the gleam. There is nothing intractable about his position like that of the Teacher, who has cut himself off completely from his loved ones and the rest of the inhabitants of the gleam world. The temptation to take the giant leap towards corruption ceaselessly assails the Man's mind over and over again, undermining his defensive mechanisms against this malady, polluting his mental adjustment, subverting his rational well-being and pushing him to the edge of nervous breakdown. The Man's dilemma of being lost in the abyss of two conflicting worlds evokes that of Baako in *Fragments* – a nightmare which not only leads to a nervous breakdown but ends in Baako's incarceration in an asylum. Hence like Baako in unusual circumstances, when the Man is compelled to answer the call of the gleam, he is usually overcome with a strange feeling of light-headedness and vacuousness:

... going into the shops with his new money in his pocket, he had had the uncontrollable feeling of happiness and power, even while knowing somewhere in the back of his mind that the expensive things he was buying would deepen the agony of his next Passion Week .... he had known it was stupid to be feeling so good just because he was buying these things he could not in the end afford, yet he could not help the smile that came to his lips and spread this feeling of well-being over all his body. If the aristocratic drinks, the White Horse whisky and the Vat 69 had been available then, he would have bought them gladly in the foolish happiness of the moment, no matter how bitterly he would have cursed himself later. It was not only because of the admiring glances of people in the shops, for whom the man's value could only be as high as the cost of the things he could buy .... There was also, inside the man himself, a very strong happiness whenever he found himself able, no matter for how brief the spell, to do the heroic things that were expected all the time, even if in the end it was only himself he was killing. How was it possible for a man to control himself, when the admiration of the world, the pride of his family and his own secret happiness at least for the



moment, all demanded that he lose control of himself and behave like someone he was not and would never be? Money. Power. (pp. 114-115)

The strangulation of Man and his society by the gleam is absolute and there is no way to escape its pervasive allure. The anti-gleam subjects are perpetually persecuted by the ideology of the gleam throughout their existential journeys of life. The Teacher's creative productivity has been reduced to nothing because he wastes all his time and energy fighting and fleeing from the ubiquitousness and molestation of the gleam. The Man is worse off: he is incapable of exorcizing the nerve-wrecking omnipresence of the gleam from his tortured mind. It is not only his waking hours which are assailed by the gleam but also his dreams at night, which are afflicted by the corrosive materialism of the gleam.

The view that both his waking hours and dreams are assailed by the gleam is sustained by a textual evidence in which the Man and an unidentified companion experience what amounts to an epiphany of the gleam. This is evoked by the following passage: "Walking with an unknown companion, scarcely even seen, in the coolness of some sweet dusk, leaving the dark, low hovels behind. Out in the distance, far away but very clearly visible, a group of shining white towers, having the stamp of the university tower at Legon and the sheer white side of the Atlantic-Caprice. They are going there, the two of them, the man and his companion, happy in the present and happy in the image of the future in the present" (p. 100). What we have here is that the Man's attraction to the gleam is so powerful that it torments him in dreams. The phrase "happy in the present and happy in the image of the future in the present" seems to suggest, rather faintly, that there is hope for the future positive transformation of the society. But this ray of hope is, in turn, annihilated by "the sheer white side of the Atlantic-Caprice, suggesting that the crippling power of the gleam is still in control, even in the Man's dream. This critical formulation is confirmed by the sudden intrusion of the blinding brilliance of lights emitted by the gleam – a dazzling glitter which instantly negates the earlier vision of hope for the future.

Though in the Man's dream, the gleam does not initially present the gleaming towering buildings as a symbol of Africa's future rites of passage, this brief illusion of hope is later obliterated. This perception is heightened by the fact that the gleam becomes an embodiment of Africa's political and Pan-Africanist attempts at Continental unity. Accordingly, the Man observes "a procession

of gleaming cars reminding the watcher of long lines of OAU men in American vehicles, swing up behind the first, and all of them go off in the direction of the towers, leaving the man behind". Like the goals of the gleam, the OAU degenerates into another rotten African political dream – the perennial monumental political betrayal of Africa. Significantly, the Man is left behind by the "procession of gleaming American cars" because he is an ostracized outsider, who does not embrace the ideology of the gleam, although he is attracted to it. In spite of the fact that the gleam appears to be blending with the shining tall buildings in the Man's dream land, in real life there is no such co-operation between the ethical values and the foul lustre of the corrupt culture which cripples Armah's fictional landscape. In this dream, the Man's companion readily submits to the blinding brightness of the gleam as reflected by her eyes – a capitulation which symbolizes the weak masses who are incapable of withstanding the pressures and the material opulence flaunted by the gleam. One can hardly help wondering if the companion in the Man's dream represents his wife, Oyo, whose addiction to the gleam alienates the Man from his loved ones. Witness, for instance, the sentence, "He has lost his companion; cohesion of the past seems beyond retrieval; the historical meaningfulness of the present seems to have been fractured; and even the future appears to promise only further capitulations to the ruthless, alien glitter of the gleam". The Man's irrevocable loss is not only a personal loss but also amounts to the fouling of Africa's historical rites of passage.

The indifferent reaction of the masses during the decolonizing years towards the middle class elite before Nkrumah appeared on the political scene and lit the fire of popular mass participation as the only viable instrument in killing the colonial beast is not only re-activated throughout the postcolonial dictatorial rule of Nkrumah, but also marks the military coup which toppled the CPP government. *The Beautiful Ones* presents the citizens of Ghana – and by extension, Africa – as being totally disillusioned with the nationalist political process in Africa – a process which is tainted with perpetual corruption and kleptomania. This lack of interest in political affairs of Africa on the part of the majority of Africans is eloquently demonstrated at the close of the novel when Nkrumah is overthrown by a *coup d'etat*:

The streets were very quiet. Only here and there, a small group of men would be talking, and it did not seem necessarily true that they were talking of the things that had taken place this day. At the bus stop people were talking, but in truth nobody knew anything except that there had been a change, and the words merely

repeated the talkers' first astonishment, then endless questions about who the new men were, what they were going to do, what they had been doing all along ... Near Effia Nkwanta [Hospital] the bus backfired, and a woman passenger with a child in her arms threw herself forward, rushing toward the entrance and screaming that they were going to kill her and her little one. Otherwise there was nothing really unusual. (p. 159)

The change ushered in by the military take-over of the Nkrumahist government draws little enthusiasm from the disillusioned populace because the citizens have at least achieved a political consciousness that enables them to realize that the supposed change will bring about no revolutionary transformation of the society: the change only means that a bunch of new men will continue the rape of Africa, initiated by fabulous ancient kings and elaborated upon by modern nationalist leaders. After all, the coup does not suggest that "the beautiful ones" are now born, for the gleam still rules this world – a political situation which creates no revolutionary climate. The military officers who stage the 1966 coup are part and parcel of the old status quo and stand to lose their selfish interests if they transformed the corrupt society. The backfiring of the bus and the stumbling of the woman with a child on her back are a negation of the new journey forward for it is only a journey backwards. The threat to them – real and imagined – is a threat to the future.

Armah appears to confirm the above interpretation when he writes: "Someday in the long future a new life would maybe flower in the country, but when it came, it would not choose as its instruments the same people who had made a habit of killing new flowers. The future goodness may come eventually, but before then where were the things in the present which would prepare the way for it" (pp. 150-151). This ambiguous narrative suggests that if the environment is revolutionarily transformed by a civic-minded generation of politicians who might be called "the beautiful ones", a new nation may be born. But the present ravaged society shows nothing to suggest that it can trigger a regeneration. This is Armah's faint hope for Africa – a dream *Two Thousand Seasons* maintains will be bear fruit after "two thousand seasons" of political brutalization in the hands of our own leaders and alien intruders. Lazarus' comment on this is illuminating when he asserts that "It is by way of answering this question, and not by way of promoting false hope, that *The Beautiful Ones* takes up the matter of living, as it were, *against* the gleam. Armah's aim is to discover the means of keeping open the possibility of future

transformation, of retaining an affirmative vision for the future in the degraded reality of the present” (Lazarus, 1990:67).

The two contradicting discourses represented by the Teacher and the Man appear to indicate that there are two strategies open to those who oppose the lifestyle recommended by the gleam. The first of these is to recognise the all-consuming disintegrating forces of the gleam and to flee from it, living the life of a cynical recluse who languishes on the fringes of society like a marginal persona. To all intents and purposes, this is the method which Rama Krishna, Maanan and the Teacher adopt in *The Beautiful Ones* in varying degrees. The second option of resistance against the gleam is to decline to acknowledge its overpowering influence over the realities of the social order, to fight against it and to undermine its power base by adopting a positive attitude to life in spite of the overwhelming odds of the situation – a strategy which the Man adopts. It must be pointed out that it is the Man’s strategy that *The Beautiful Ones* recommends.

The Teacher-Maanan-Krishna strategy – the notion of evading the foul world – is projected by the novel as being both negative and self-annihilating. This vision is conveyed by the Teacher’s anti-social ethic, Maanan’s insanity and Rama Krishna’s spiritual escapism and his final demise. That the flight from self does not resolve the destructive potentials of the gleam is powerfully invoked by Rama Krishna’s futile attempts to evade the corrupting influences of the gleam and his ironical end. We are told that, to keep his soul pure, Rama Krishna has taken a “long and tortured flight from ... the horrible threat of decay” and devotes his life to “meditative exercises and special diets of honey and vinegar, and a firm refusal to kill any living thing for food” (p. 48). In spite of all these stringent measures against the putrescent powers of the gleam, Rama Krishna dies of a disease which “had completely eaten up the frail matter of his lungs, and ... where his heart ought to be have been there was only a living lot of worms gathered together tightly in the shape of a heart” (p. 49). This ironic reversal serves as warning to those who want to live a separate independent life completely cut from the society: that this strategy is a negation of life, a living death.

Captivated by Nkrumah’s charming and charismatic personality during the era of decolonization, exploited sexually and abandoned when independence is won, Maanan is another character who flees into madness in order to escape both the falsehood of the gleam and the Show Boy’s

monstrous betrayal of the nation and herself. Maanan's journey of life evokes the general position of how women are treated by the Nkrumahist big shots. Using the moral filter of the Teacher, the text declares that "Women, so horribly young, fucked and changed like pants, asking only for blouses and perfume from diplomatic bags and wigs of human hair scraped from ... decayed white woman's corpse" (p. 89). Lazarus articulates Maanan's maltreatment by Armah's amoral fictive world: "As a woman in a patriarchal and fetishistic society, she is treated as an object very similar to one of the commodities in Koomson's house: an object to be pursued, bought, and consumed" (Lazarus, 1990:68) and we might add: and evacuated in the manner of ingestion-evacuation cycle as excretory matter. Although Maanan refuses to submit to these degrading attributes of the gleam, she makes a serious error of judgment when she offers her love to Nkrumah, who turns out to be the epitome of the gleam. Her struggle to live above the gleam proves hopeless: a perception which is sustained by her escapism in *wee* (marijuana) smoking, finding "refuge in lengthening bottles" and selling herself sexually to passing foreign sailors (p. 66). At the end of her agonized rite of passage, the Man meets Maanan, who is completely mad beyond redemption, talking incoherently to herself: "They have mixed it all together! Everything! They have mixed everything. And now how can I find it when they have mixed it all with so many other things" (p. 180). Maanan's search is for past self-identity – an impossible quest because, in Nkrumah's Ghana, the present and the past are transformed into one grotesque monolithic ideology, the gleam.

Significantly, it is through the two contesting discourses of the Teacher and of the Man that the contrasting strategies of confronting the gleam are unequivocally projected. At a literal level, the Teacher's view on the debate appears more authentic and viable – an impression which is deflated when compared to the Man's reflections on the matter. This illusory authenticity is conveyed by the fact that the Teacher is endowed with intellectual and philosophical bearing which flavours his reflections with persuasive rationalism. The Man, on the other hand, is crippled with vacillation and lack of self-confidence – characteristics which tend to render his arguments incoherent. Besides these differences between the two advocates for resistance against the gleam, the Teacher is hampered by no family attachments, while the Man is constantly harassed by his loved ones, leaving him no independent course of action. Also crucial is the fact that even though both men are persecuted by the gleam and experience acute alienation, their lifestyles are different. While the Teacher chooses a life of absolute isolation from the rest of the society, the Man is forced to

affiliate with the subjects of the gleam because his destiny is yoked to theirs on account of his having a wife and children. Perhaps I should add that, notwithstanding the similarity between the two men, the Man “is more acted upon than actor in this regard, being ostracized by a society at large that regards his integrity as anti-social” (Lazarus, 1990:69). The Teacher, however, is the most powerful negative resistance to the gleam. Besides this the Teacher is also the greatest symbol of the flight from the paralysing powers of the gleam – a destructive self-alienation.

The voice of the Teacher is as much a creative device belonging to Armah as his own direct interventions. Some critics have suggested that the Teacher operates as an alternative counter-discourse to Armah’s own authorial intrusions in the book. Such a view is espoused by Kofi Yankson in his essay entitled “*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born: An Anatomy of Shit*” (1971). Yankson has contended that the novel’s thrust is that resistance, not flight, is the only viable way of life outside the gleam. Robert Fraser argues that the Man’s two outstanding attributes serve as the rejection of the Teacher’s central meaninglessness of life through self-imposed exile from all social contacts. These two attributes are “his stubborn refusal to compromise on basic principles” and “his decision to put into practice the official [CPP] ... ideals of ‘hard work and honesty and integrity’” (p. 95) (Fraser, 1980:16).

The root cause of the Teacher’s retreat from the degraded society stems from his wholehearted devotion to Nkrumah’s political ideology during the decolonizing years – a past dedication which triggers his current debilitating cosmic alienation. Like Maanan, the Teacher was so charmed by Nkrumah’s political image and charismatic personality that he put all his trust in Nkrumah’s ability to transform the Gold Coast society – a trust which is so obscenely abused that the attendant disillusionment engendered by it permanently destroys the Teacher’s faith in humanity as a whole. Nkrumah’s monstrous betrayal of Africa becomes, in the eyes of the Teacher, a heinous treachery against all humanity. Accordingly, Nkrumah’s political career becomes Africa’s destiny – a historical rite of passage epitomizing an endless African cycle of hope, betrayal, and unrelieved despair. The intensity of the Teacher’s agony is captured by the following: “It is not a choice between life and death, but what kind of death we can bear, in the end. Have you not seen there is no salvation anywhere?” (p. 56). Led by his cynical philosophy on life, the Teacher concludes that though situations may generate hope of a brighter tomorrow, the ephemeral nature of things



and the fact that dreams and hopes seem to embody seeds of their future rot, the only option open to Man is flight from the gleam:

The man remembered times when Teacher had talked with eagerness about hopeful things, but then always there was the ending, when he would deliberately ask whether the rot and weakness were not after all the eternal curse of Africa itself, against which people could do nothing that would last. Sometimes this hope of death would spread all over the world. When Teacher had talked of people standing up and deciding then and there to do what ages and millions had called impossible, had talked of the Chinese Mao and the Cuban Castro struggling in the face of all reasonable hope, even then Teacher's mind would look beyond the clear awakening and see after the dawn the bright morning and the noonday, the afternoon, dusk, and the another night of darkness and fatigue. Once he had asked whether it was true that we were merely asleep, and not just dead, never to aspire anymore. So even after the big moments he hopes for, the question always remains with Teacher: is it all worthwhile, then? And he sighs from long habit, reproaching himself for wishing after impossible dreams. (p. 91)

In consonance with the Teacher's spiritual and existential demise, this quote represents the predominating mood of eternal despair and meaninglessness of life which has become the hallmark of the Teacher's living death. According to the Teacher there is no vestigial existence of social moorings upon which to build public ethical structures. The political euphoria induced by mass political agitation: "weapons of ... legitimate political resistance, newspaper and educational campaigns and, as a last resort, the constitutional application of strikes, boycotts, and the Gandhian principle of non-violent positive action and non-cooperation" (Cited in Italiaander, 1961) during the era of decolonization – all these positive political measures "subside, decay and dissolve" into nothingness (Lazarus, 1990:71) after independence. The Teacher, the philosophical narrative voice, which espouses this view of absolute cynicism conveys his feelings as follows: "So much time has gone by and still there is no sweetness here" (p. 67). To magnify the significance of the role the Teacher in the dialectical complexity of the novel, Armah further exploits this role. Armah's preoccupation, however, is the dizzying speed with which agents of rot and decadence transform Africa into marvellous rottenness. In the Teacher's own words: "How could this [this initial euphoria] have grown rotten with such obscene haste?" (p. 88).

This investigation cannot be complete without some commentary on Armah's exploitation of scatology and dystopian metaphors. As Derek Wright puts it in his *Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa* (1989), "The novel's scatology, as a startling example, is at least marginally indebted to the

[Black] American vernacular. Filth and shit, which have a way of finding out fraud and guilt and bringing the powerful back to the squalor out of which they have corruptly carved a niche of cleanness and prosperity, function as levelling metaphors which put down pretension, expose false gentility and attack corrupt leadership” (Wright, 1989:81). Though Armah’s complex network of symbols is said to be influenced by Western allegorical mode, there is enough textual evidence to suggest that their poignance and very explicit composition derive from African oral tradition symbolism. To achieve his creative purpose, Armah deploys a flamboyant and carefully-structured symbolism. This narrative strategy is marked by the unproductive ruling elite’s voracious over-eating of Ghana’s resources – a stylistic technique which anticipates Koomson’s rebellious belly and loud farting, the heaps of accumulated, primeval and undisposed-mound of excreta and dirt in this filthy and revolting world. One traditional concept which appears to shape and to inform the novel is the image of “eating”. The perception of the image of “eating” is confirmed by the various events which depict corruption as eating bribes. These pervasive structuring metaphors include the fat-bellied timber contractor, Amankwa, tortured by his generations of pile-up teeth; the bribe-addicted policemen and the new Nkrumahist leaders “grown fat and cynical from eating centuries of power they had never struggled for” (p. 81) and the corrupt bus conductor, who inhales the putrid aroma of the cedi note “as if it were some exotic spicy food” (Wright, 1989:83).

The simple West African tradition of offering *kola* to elders and important guests as a symbol of respect lays the foundation stone to the genesis of the image of ritual eating which is converted into the perverted practice of offering bribes. Accordingly, at the road block which closes the novel after the coup, the Man notices a corrupt policeman “raised his right hand and in a slow gesture pointed to his teeth”, signifying that he wants to eat and the Man expects him to add the customary wisecrack, “Even kola nuts can say ‘thanks’” (p. 182). This affirms the critical formulation that Armah exploits the image of eating which is a degenerated form of pristine tradition of offering *kola nuts* to influential guests. At issue here is the fact that like the kings of pre-colonial Africa, the Nkrumahist leaders have prostituted pedigree rituals in their attempt to legitimate their repressive and corrupt regime through traditionalism, however, perverted. Like the perversion of *kola* offerings into bribe eating of money, the dishonest clerk in the Man’s office fabricates stories of the deaths of his relative and is permanently granted leave of absence from duty – a fraudulent behaviour which subverts the extended family system and tradition.

Another destructive undercurrent which undermines traditional Africa is the jet-set notion of time. The seasonal traditional cycle of time – a continuum which, unlike the European notion of lineal time sequence which is always in hurry to accomplish its day's course – the African notion is one of slow movement. Armah suggests that this casual attitude to time is replaced by dizzying speed. Wright elucidates this change: "It is, by massive metaphoric implication, the vast entropized weight of Africa's history which, in the omission of periodic reformation and regeneration, renews only its own decay and bequeaths only its old age to young lives, leaving power in the hands of moribund politicians grown cynical with 'the eating of centuries of power' or men like Nkrumah, 'a new old lawyer, wanting to be white'" (Wright, 1989:81;84). This interpretation is endorsed by a number of images: the young-decayed man-child, the putrescent polish of the wooden banister, the rapid decay of the new Nkrumahist leaders, the rotten ancient stench of the brand new cedi note, and the harlot's "prematurely tired skin" (p. 35). Perhaps I must add that natural putrescence of the wooden banister's "long piece of diseased skin" is a potent power which not only infuses and annihilates, but also transforms all freshness into its own "victorious filth" (pp. 11-12), signifying the bequeathed alluring power of the gleam's corrupting dynamics. Another traditional African motif Armah manipulates in depicting the multifarious effects of the gleam is *abiku*.

Armah also compares the cycle of repeated political follies Africa is fated to go through to the evil cycle of *abiku* child who is doomed to an endless cycle of conception-birth-death-rebirth. In *Fragments*, Armah treats this theme again and depicts the remorseless wheel of *abiku*, which Baako's sister Araba is doomed to suffer. Armah uses this ritual motif in nascent form in *Two Thousand Seasons* through Abena's initiation dance. The motif resurfaces in a fully matured form when Araba Jesiwa is submitted to the abyss of *abiku* in *The Healers*. Wright presents an illuminating comment on the topic. The critic writes:

On the minor time-scale, Africa's colonial-tainted power regimes are picture as an encycled series of shot-lived progeric children or *amomawu* [Akan for *abiku*] spirit-children born only to die prematurely, doomed to repeat the past until they can confront it and learn from it. Such a death-birth is the anti-Nkrumah coup announced by the Time-Allocation Clark, the man knows all about the way time works in contemporary Africa....

(Wright, 1989:103)

This cynical vision of rites of passage of Africa, Armah's insists again and again, has always been Africa's destiny, Africa's history. The Man's comment on the political culture of Africa unequivocally vindicates this interpretation: "Now another group of bellies will be bursting with the country's riches!" "New people, new style, old dance," the man ruefully observes" (pp. 157-158). In his essay, "Tradition and Vision of the Past in Armah's Early Novels" (1985), Wright reiterates the view that Ghana is doomed to suffer the evil cycle of *abiku*. The critic declares that "Teacher depicts the new Ghana and its Independence regime, born out of the war [World War II], as a violent death-child, an Akan 'amomawu', doomed to its repetition of premature deaths" (Wright, 1985:86). This observation seems to be endorsed by Eldred Jones in his "Review of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*" (1969). Jones asserts that "In his anonymity he [the Man] represents the millions of victims of political organisation in Africa" (Jones, 1969:55).

If we pull all the threads of hopelessness projected in *The Beautiful Ones*, one wonders whether the coup has achieved anything tangible. Armah self-consciously links the ancient Africa, colonial Africa and postcolonial Africa to one monstrous and marvellous rottenness. Exploiting Koomson as the epitome of Nkrumah's corrupt regime, we are told that opulence and obscene consumption of the nation's resources has transformed them into fat oily maggots: "And yet these were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with the ancestral softness of chiefs who sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruits of the trade" (p. 131). The vision Armah is straining to convey is that Africa's political culture of corruption and exploitation of the masses could be traced to the ancient past. The past evils beget the present ills. This citation also underpins Armah's thematic preoccupation with the Middle Passage which is also elaborately treated in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. This view is substantiated by Armah's own words as follows: "He [the Man] could have asked if anything was supposed to have changed after all, from the days of chiefs selling their people for the trinkets of Europe" (p. 149). My concern at this stage is to link Armah to the general view that African postcolonial leaders continue where ancient African chiefs had left off.

I argue that portraying the corrupt modern African leadership as a mere extension of the despotic ancient legendary rulers is a general creative trend sweeping across Africa and not merely Armah's personal view of Africa's foul political history. The tendency among radical African writers to project a vision which perceives traditional African rulers as the fountainheads of the

recurrent despotism, political corruption and brutalization of the poverty-stricken populace appears to preoccupy Kofi Awoonor, a Ghanaian writer, whose works are grounded on Ewe oral dirge and traditionalism – a thematic bearing which stamps his works with conservatism, separating him from the enraged radical and iconoclastic writers like Yambo Ouologuem and Ayi Kwei Armah.

We cannot regard the many rebirths – the rebirth of the Man and Koomson through the latrine hole, Koomson's rebirth into Ivory Coast, the Man's purification in the sea after rescuing Koomson – as promising any permanent communal cleansing or regeneration of the society. At best, the excretory birth through the latrine hole may best be described as a heretical rebirth, which Lemuel A. Johnson likens to an *abiku* child and describes in his "The Middle Passage in African Literature" (1980) as "a growth whose stubborn metastasis is from 'branded womb to branded womb'" (Johnson, 1980:75). Commenting on Koomson's rebirth through the shit hole, Wright asserts that "Koomson's excretory 'rebirth' through the latrine hole, symbolically naked and pushed head first' by the man as midwife, is the culminating mock ritual of passage, the irony too deliberately droll for it to be anything but the purest parody" (Wright, 1989:129).

Armah insists again and again that no empowerment of the populace has ever taken place. Endorsing the above critical formulation that no fundamental change has occurred, Ogungbesan observes that "It is true that no fundamental change has taken place in the life of the nation; just a change of men, not programmes .... Yet a fundamental change has taken place within the life of the individual. Koomson is like 'a man at his own funeral'. Like the bus conductor at the beginning of the story, he is shaken by this apparent rousing which has turned the sleepers to watchers" (Ogungbesan, 1977:107). As the Nigerian critic has rightly pointed out, the only visible achievement of the coup appears to be a personal or individual one. Firstly, the Man is vindicated for upholding his integrity and refusing to embrace the gleam. His wife's realization of this when the true rotten personality of Koomson is revealed substantiates this view. The second advantage of the coup is that there is some poetic justice in the status-reversal the Nkrumahists have been subjected to. Thus the Koomsons and the Nkrumahs become nobodies as they have always been since the beginning of their political rites of passage. In Armah's own words: "The individual man of power now shivering, his head filled with fear of vengeance of those he had wronged. For him everything was going to change" (p. 162). There is, however, the faint hope that in the distant

future, the society will be positively transformed to create a fertile soil for a new flowering to grow. This view is sustained by the colour green and by the “single flower, solitary, unexplainable, and very beautiful” (p. 183) and further re-affirmed by the phrase “Not Yet Born”.

## NOTES

- 1 . Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1968). All page references are taken (in brackets) from the Heinemann 1968 edition.
- 2 . Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 55 and his article “Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will: A Reading of Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones*, *Research in African Literatures*, 18, 2 (1987), p. 147. Lazarus rejects Shatto Arthur Gakwandi’s charge that Armah exhibits a profound “disgust [towards] ... humanity, especially the African part of it and in particular, Ghana. So wicked, so dirty and so corrupt is humanity that there is no point in the individual’s trying to change it”, *The Novel and the Contemporary Experience in Africa*, (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 97.
- 3 . “The Verandah Boy” “was the homeless, propertyless, and jobless Ghanaian commoner desperate for change”, to borrow from “Letter from Ghana” (p. 34) – a derogative nickname which his political opponents gave him and which the cunning politician exploited it to form a common bond with the masses who transferred power from the middle class elite to him.
- 4 . George B. N. Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), pp. 160-168. Although Ayittey lampoons the contemporary African leaders for their political corruption and kleptomania, he romanticizes Africa’s indigenous rulers, the kings and the chiefs.
- 5 . Rolf Italiaander, *The New Leaders of Africa* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961), p.242. Nkrumah bombastic choice of words in which he referred to the Ghanaian electorate as “the battering ram of the illiterate masses” suggests that this is the tainted postcolonial Nkrumah, who had made the transition from the humble “Verandah Boy” to the pompous and tyrannical “Show Boy”.



## Chapter Four

### Independent Ghana Portrayed As A Neo-Colony: Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*

The purpose of this chapter is to substantiate the thesis that in *Fragments* Ayi Kwei Armah argues that the postcolonial African intelligentsia and rulers betray Africa and that “traditional” African family system has been viciously subverted by crass materialism. Armah maintains that the Euro-American mentors help the African leaders in effecting the rape of the African Continent. To put it differently, in *Fragments* the African intellectuals and the ruling elites are portrayed as miscreants and parasites. Armah uses contemporary Ghana as the test case for the African Continent as a whole. He manipulates multifarious creative techniques in order to sustain his deglorification of Africa's political leadership. In his article entitled “The Postcolonial Dream” (1980), Daniel Massa makes a pertinent critical assertion which reveals why African postcolonial creative works tend to castigate African leadership and traditional life. Massa contends that “Whereas before independence the [African] writer could align himself with the community in eroding or debunking the myths of colonization, in the postcolonial period he refuses complacently to create or establish the idealized counter-myth of the decolonized who is always right, just and fair” (Massa, 1980:145). Armah's disfigured image of the Ghanaian society is confirmed by William Walker in his PhD dissertation entitled *Major Ghanaian Fiction in English: A Study of the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah and Kofi Awoonor* (1975). In his chapter on *Fragments* Walker asserts that “... once again Armah subjects his homeland to a scathing attack. The difference [between *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*], however, is that the author's vision is, if anything, more bleak than the previous work” (Walker, 1975:113). Before I tackle the big issues, let me sketch the plot of the novel.

As in *The Healers*, Armah in *Fragments*, which is set in the late 1960s (about a decade after Ghana's independence from Britain), excavates Akan ritual motifs which he transforms into a seductively simple fiction whose deeper intricate concerns are concealed within this overt surface simplicity. The plot-line recounts a story of Baako Onipa, a young Ghanaian, who goes to the USA to study television script-writing/creative writing. His voyage/departure to the world of the “Olympians” (Euro-Americans) is ritually announced to the ancestral spirit world through the process of libation that is initially performed by his uncle Foli, whose moral handicap is

mysteriously described as “a spirit flawed by the heaviness of flesh too often listened to” (p. 3). As the ritual ceremony of libation proceeds, we learn that the spiritual deformity which plagues Baako’s uncle is one of inordinate greed. Thus “the drunken Foli”, who has a voracious appetite for hot liquors, violates the ceremony by reserving the lion share of the ceremonial schnaps for his own consumption. It is left to Naana, Baako’s mystical blind grandmother, to save the situation by asking Foli to give her some of the liquor to drink. The visionary all-seeing-sightless grandmother, however, pours all the liquor she is given on the ground for the thirsty ancestors (pp. 3-8). Naana explicates why it is necessary for the libation to conform to the immutable customs of the Akans. The desecration of this ritual ceremony, Naana informs the reader, might have turned the ancestors’s anger against Baako. In Naana’s own words, “The spirits would have been angry and they would have turned their anger against him [Baako]. He would have been destroyed” (p. 8). In his PhD thesis Walker compares *Fragments* to *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and points out that “Like *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* presents a central character who is unable to fit into his society not because he *can* not, but because he *will* not. In both novels, the author indicates that it is the society that is out of step, not the protagonist” (Walker, 1975:113).

In spite of this initial fouling of the ceremony, Naana tells us that notwithstanding Foli’s spiritual deformity, “his words had a perfect completeness” (p. 3). In the USA Baako has a nervous breakdown and is admitted into a hospital. There is evidence to suggest that Baako, like Modin in *Why Are We So Blest?*, does not want to have anything to do with the elitist status reserved for the “extraordinary hero” or the been-to, and this accounts for both his nervous breakdown and his reluctance to return to Ghana. The axis of the tale, however, centres on Baako’s return home after five years of study in America. On his arrival back home, Baako is eager to use his acquired skills – referred to as “the fire” – in lifting the general standard of living of the entire community. However, Baako very soon realises that the existing setup of the Ghanaian society makes this kind of patriotic service impossible to render. In his essay entitled “*Fragments: Between the Loved Ones and the Community*”, Joseph Lurie illuminates Baako’s dilemma and his reappraisal of his role as an artist and his relationship with his family. Lurie asserts that “The political nature of his search for meaning together with his struggle to escape the thriving cargo mentality in Ghana presents Baako with conflicts which cause him to reappraise both his role as an artist and his

relationship to [sic] his family" (Lurie, 1973:31).

Just as in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* Armah castigates the imperialist hegemony of both Arabs and Europeans, in *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Fragments* the anti-neo-colonialist theme is given a multi-dimensional treatment. Perhaps the most damaging representation of contemporary Ghana – and by implication all African states – is the vision which perceives African nations as mere neo-colonies: silly puppets dancing to the tune of Western international capitalism, and especially the International Monetary Fund. This critical formulation is powerfully conveyed by Armah's heavily symbolic television screenplay entitled *The Brand*. This film script invokes an enigmatic sustained image of Ghana as a neo-colony. To translate his creative vision of representing African states as second rate states without economic independence, or as neo-colonies, Armah exploits images and colours to etch in the nature of the neo-colonialism that strangulates the African Continent:

SINGLE DARK CIRCLE FILLING THE SCREEN, REPRESENTING THE WEAK PERIPHERY, LARGE ENVIRONMENT, HABITAT OF THE OPPRESSED. ON WHICH A SQUARE IS SUPERIMPOSED, WHITE, TOUGH CONCRETE FORTIFICATION (p. 148).

The "SINGLE DARK CIRCLE" represents the "habitat of the oppressed", "the communal dirt"/ "the plains of mediocrity"/"Tartarus" (*Why Are We So Blest?*, pp. 100-101) where the "disenfranchised and powerless" (Neil Lazarus, 1990:81) wallow in mud. Though the dispossessed "oppressed" form the majority, "their subjugation" (to borrow from Lazarus) "is complete" (Lazarus, 1990:81). An overwhelming majority of the oppressed is dominated by one enormous obsession: to scale the ladder which is "MADE OF THE SHOULDERS OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE LOWER LEVEL, THE OPPRESSED" and leads "FROM WEAK CIRCLE TO STRONG SQUARE" (p. 211), the primary mainspring of opulence and power. In consonance with Armah's manipulation of the myth of the extraordinary hero (the been-to/the cargo Messiah) and as epitomized in the Melanesian cargo cults exploited by Armah (Kenelm Burridge, 1960: xviii),<sup>1</sup> all prospective climbers are introduced to the reader as "heroes":

AT EACH STEP HE HAS TO JUSTIFY HIS CLIMB, TO HIMSELF, AND TO THE SHOULDERS UNDER HIM. THE BALANCE GETS PRECARIOUS

NEAR THE SQUARE. JUSTIFICATION CONSISTS OF HERO'S REITERATED PROMISE HE'S ONLY CLIMBING UP TO FIND THE MEANS TO LIBERATE THOSE WHOSE SHOULDERS HE'S CLIMBED ON. THIS THEME ESTABLISHED IN AN ENTHUSIASM RALLY WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO DRUM UP MATERIAL AND MORAL SUPPORT FOR THE HERO'S CLIMBING EFFORT. AT END HERO HAS ARRIVED AND IS CLINGING DANGEROUSLY TO THE SHEER SIDE OF THE SQUARE NOT GOING BACK DOWN. IT'S PLAIN THE CLIMB ITSELF, THE PROCESS OF GETTING TO THE SQUARE, HAS INJECTED INTO HIS BEING AN ADDICTION TO WAYS AND HABITS DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO THE LIBERATOR'S CAREER (p. 148).

The screenplay ingeniously weaves into its narrative textuality the duplicitous antics of the African political leaders who seduce the naive masses, the pawns, with rosy promises which are quickly forgotten once the leaders have won elections and become Heads of States. Also woven into the screenplay is the tendency of African Heads of States to become tyrants and to declare themselves life Presidents – a view conveyed by the sentence “IT'S PLAIN THE CLIMB ITSELF, THE PROCESS OF GETTING TO THE SQUARE, HAS INJECTED INTO HIS BEING AN ADDICTION TO WAYS AND HABITS DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO THE LIBERATOR'S CAREER” (p. 148). My reading of Burridge's *Mambu* (1960) seems to suggest that this mosaic script evokes the emotions of the Melanesian Cargo Movement. Armah underpins the social and political repercussions of the process of climbing the square: the tendency of the successful climbers becoming addicted to the rarefied air up there and the reluctance to come down to help those who pushed them up to the top of Mount Olympus. Commenting on the betrayal of successful climbers who symbolize the politics of villainy in which African political leaders backstab their deluded electorate, Lazarus argues that:

Baako emphasizes the social consequences of the act of climbing. In his screenplay, all successful climbers internalize the ways of the square. Reaching their goal, they only ever perpetuate the inequalities between the life it offers and the life of “the oppressed” below. It is as though no climber who was not prepared to forsake his commitment to those below could ever hope to reach the square. One is marked out for the greatness that the square bestows, it would seem, by one's malleability in absorbing its values. (Lazarus, 1990:82)

The diagrammatic representation of the screenplay needs unravelling. The square represents the propertied privileged society exemplified by the local “men of substance”, the ruling class.

Immediately below them we have the competitors ascending toward the square, the mounters climbing the human ladder of shoulders leading to it. It is crucial to point out that the climbers who have not yet reached their treasured destination include all the minor characters like Bukari, Boateng and Baako's mother and sister, Efua and Araba. These characters represent the lower rank of the middle class, the most powerful protagonists of the belief systems of the square. Though they are non-members of "this exclusive rich folk's club", they doggedly strive to be members some day. The last class of the poverty stricken dark circle is described by Lazarus as "the urban and rural masses, the largely defeated inhabitants of the dark world of the circle. For the overwhelming majority of them, there is only hardship and toil and the bleak experience of life ..." (Lazarus, 1990:82).

To magnify his abhorrence of "the black slave factors" and "black neo-colonialists" who masquerade as Africa's political leaders, Armah carefully isolates the role of the "men of substance", the ruling elites, for virulent indictment. In Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, the ruling elites preside over the affairs of the state. All over Africa the political leaders together with the intelligentsia behave like "new Europeans", or what Lurie (1973:33) aptly calls "a walking caricature of a European". Notwithstanding the fact that African rulers and the intellectuals project themselves self-consciously as walking parodies of the Euro-American and the West, the situation itself is paradoxical if not absurdly grotesque. The anathema of neo-colonialism which plagues Africa since March 6 1956, when Ghana achieved political independence, is brilliantly explicated by Lazarus as follows:

For they are simultaneously the executives and the victims of neocolonialism. As rulers of a neocolony they implement policy decisions that are in effect taken for them by the West [through the International Monetary Fund]. The implications of this are double edged. On the one hand, these "men of substance" have genuinely taken over where their former masters, the European colonialists, had left off. Their wealth and power – "the most visible manifestation[s] of the new colonialism" – are real enough, as also is their determination to maintain them. But on the other hand, these "men of substance" are only neocolonialism's front men, local puppets dancing to the tune of international capital. (Lazarus, 1990:82-83)

As Armah pungently states in *Why Are We So Blest?*, Africa's elites are turned by the West "into eaters of crumbs in the [West's] house of slavery" (p. 84). The vision which Armah insists on conveying is the recurrent idea that Africa is doomed to repeated cycles of historical follies: the

independence the colonized and disinherited populace hoped for and fought for turns out to be, ironically, the new mystified black colonialism which is more vicious and increasingly more rapacious than the European colonization and its attendant pillage of Africa's resources. In his "African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific" (1967) Armah lampoons postcolonial African leaders for using the rhetoric of Negritude to conceal the evil of black neo-colonialism from the naive, oppressed masses of Africa.

*Fragments* deploys the image of a neo-colony in order to sustain the thesis that Ghana in particular and Africa in general are still economically controlled by the West. To sustain this vision with fictional realism, Armah self-referentially juxtaposes an unfinished "NEW TECHNICAL SECONDARY SCHOOL" whose "foundations" were laid several years ago with the shining Texaco petrol dump (pp. 13-14). There are also huge Shell tankers that rumble past "a shut-down distillery – the end of someone's dream" (p. 21). On Baako's arrival at Accra Kotoka International Airport he notices neon lights advertising USA imported "STATE EXPRESS 555" cigarettes, which are meant to transport the African smoker into *the smooth and sophisticated world of classy living* (p. 57). In Armah's own words, the advert invites the Ghanaian smoker to "get the taste of international success [,] the smooth exquisite flavor of a high class cigarette" (p. 57). Intent upon hammering the view home, we are told that on getting to the new Wing at the Korle Bu Hospital reputed to be clean and well-equipped as compared to the old dilapidated hospital, Baako whose sister Araba is in labour, discovers that it is reserved for VIPs, senior civil servants and Euro-Americans. Similarly the reader notices that there is "the new Barclays Bank" and "a newer Standard Bank" (p. 15), but again Armah self-consciously juxtaposes these visible symbols of Western capitalism and economic control of Ghana and the rest of Africa where the scenario is applicable, with a "neglected old church" (p. 15). This creative ploy suggests the spiritual death of a community where the cargo or materialism becomes the new god.

In his article entitled "Lust For Material Well-Being in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*", G. Ojong Ayuk elucidates the root cause of lack of social revolution in Africa. Ayuk reports that Armah "... emphasizes that the decay and the halting of onward march of the African revolution in many [African] countries (especially in Ghana) stems from an excessive lust for material goods with which the privileged few want to surround themselves, to the almost total



African ruling class's psychological and ideological dependence on Europe and the West for its survival. Witness for instance how the television sets bought to be distributed to the impoverished rural communities, so that Baako's screenplays can be viewed by rural people, are distributed instead to "men of substance" who could afford their own sets. The Ghanaian populace, particularly the womankind, appears to be mesmerized by one supreme goal: to use a skin-lightening cream called "Ambi-Extra" to bleach their black skin into light-coloured pigmentation:

The calendar itself was a small thing suspended from a very large color picture advertising something called AMBI-EXTRA skin-lightening cream. In the center foreground stood a couple of Africans with successfully bleached skins looking a forced yellow-brown. Around them several darker Africans stood in various poses, all open-mouthed with admiration of the bleached pair (p. 87).

The compulsive obsession to look "whitish", like Euro-American, and behave like one is rehearsed in the corpus. Thus we are told that the taxi driver who takes Baako from the airport to the Avenida Hotel speaks a brand of grotesque English which is a blend of American slang and pidgin. Consider, for example, the taxi driver referring to Fifi Williams (Baako's friend) as a "swinging nigger" and when Baako asks what that means he answers: "You don't know the latest terms here" (p. 63). The narrator confirms this proclivity among Ghanaians as follows: "The woman spoke a kind of English that was mostly American in sound, and her words were freely mixed with Hausa and Ga and some Fanti words, but the whole stream was clear to Juana in the end ..." (p. 17). Lazarus captures the novel's mood of Africa's mimicry of the West and Euro-America when he asserts that:

The lives of characters like Brempong in the novel are wholly consumed with the ambition to become black white people, to root, to destroy all traces of their own African heritage, and to ape the behaviour of the European expatriates. Yet it is not only the powerful who play at being Europeans: for nearly every character casually described in *Fragments* seems to be obsessed with either being regarded as white or Western. An American way of life has become fashionable in the streets of Accra; wearing of wigs and garish make-up are prerequisites for being seen fashionable; advertisements for skin-lightening cream are prominently displayed in magazines and on calendar covers .... (Lazarus, 1990:85)

This desire to acquire Western goods and habits appear to be analogous to the Melanesian cargo cults Baako manipulates in chapter 9 (*Dam*). Lurie argues that "In general, the desire of the masses to possess goods held by a small elite results in the formation of [cargo] cults in which a

second coming is prepared for by destroying traditions which make way for the westernization of life (Lurie, 1973:32). It is not surprising that “even traditional children's songs have been rendered unacceptable, voided from public memory and replaced by ‘Jack and Jill’ (Lazarus, 1990:85). It is crucial to observe that the children find it difficult to recite the unfamiliar English words and experience great difficulty in pronouncing the Un-African English words. The giving up of traditional ditties for banal European children songs is explicated by the narrator as follows:

Jaaack and Jill

Went aaap the hill

To fetch a pail of waaatah (p.69).

The rush for Europeanization has its own rewards for both those in the square and the prospective climbers. What is of paramount importance is not mere acquisition of wealth and power but rather how power and wealth are exploited to magnify one's social status and opulence. The death of “pristine traditions” is noticeable in Armah's Ghana and Africa. Drawing on Ronald Rassner's unpublished paper entitled “*Fragments and the Cargo Mentality*” (1973), Lurie records that “A further aspect to the millennial hopes characteristic in cargo cults noted by Rassner is reflected in the renunciation of traditional practices and the subsequent espousal of European customs” (Lurie, 1973:32). This view implies that the disintegration of pristine rituals in Ghana and the rest of Africa is triggered by response to the cargo mentality which plagues the continent. Thus the sacrosanct rituals which govern outdoorings in Ghana are ignored. The detailed Westernization of the ritual with all its cargo-oriented ramifications is so “white-washed” as to become absurdly bizarre:

Woolen suits, flashing shoes, imported cross legs, bright rings shown on intertwined fingers held in front of restful bellies, an authentic cold climate overcoat from Europe or America held traveller-fashion over an arm, five or six waistcoats, silken ties and silver clasps, and a magnificent sane man in a university gown reigning over four admiring women in white lace covershirts on new dumas cloth; long, twinkling earrings, gold necklaces, quick-shining wristwatches, a great rich splendor stifling all these people in the warmth of a beautiful day .... (225-227).

What is crucial here is the slavish and addiction-generating mimicry of Euro-American patterns

of consumption on the part of the Ghanaian *petite bourgeoisie* in particular and Africa's middle class in general. In *Fragments* Armah is preoccupied with probing the thematic implications of this mimicry. The outdoor ceremony is not concerned with spiritual growth of Africa but is rather turned into a conveyor belt for receiving cargo. Though Baako protests about Araba's and Efua's turning of the baby into a money-making tool, he has been coerced into playing the role of master of ceremonies. Both Baako and the baby are perceived as conveyor belts for the delivering of the goods which the family has been expecting. They have lost their humanity and are perceived as ghosts or extraordinary heroes from the spirit world who bring wealth and power to the Onipa family.

The notion of parasiticism which Armah elaborately delineates in *The Beautiful Ones* and is rehearsed in *Two Thousand Seasons* is eclectically exploited in *Fragments* through the use of the Melanesian cargo cultist ethnography. The Melanesian Cults Armah sketches in the novel are analogous to the craving for status by the men of substance / the men of wealth and power who are Blest while the dispossessed oppressed inhabitants wallow in the communal dirt. This theme is crucial to our understanding of the myth of the extraordinary hero Armah exploits in translating his creative purpose into fiction. Baako explains the intricacies of the myth to Juana as follows:

The voyage abroad, everything that follows; it's very much a colonial thing. But the hero idea itself is something very old. It's the myth of the extraordinary man who brings about a complete turnabout in terrible circumstances. We have the old heroes who turned defeat into victory for the whole community. But these days the community has disappeared from the story. Instead, there is the family, and the hero comes and turns its [family's] poverty into sudden wealth. And the external enemy isn't the one at whose expense the hero gets his victory; he's supposed to get rich, mainly at the expense of the community (p. 103).

The above mosaic narrative weaves into its narrative system two versions of the myth of the supernatural hero: the ancient unsullied one versus the contemporary "cargofied" perverted one in which the national resources and wealth of the larger community are raped by new heroes for the eternal enjoyments of their family members. In the old myth the hero goes on a voyage which turns him mystically into a ghost, a beneficial cargo conveyor belt, which delivers wealth to the living members of the community. In Armah's own words, we are told that in the USA Baako "walked among" the Olympians (Americans) "neither touched nor seen, like a ghost in an

overturned world” (p. 11). This is the spiritual and creative role Baako, like Modin in *Why Are We So Blest?*, wants to play and he becomes more convinced when he watches the fisher boy with the gong play a similar role when he aids ungrateful fishermen pull their net with his music.

At issue here is the degeneration of African traditions and the text's manipulation of Africa's pathological obsession with Europe and European ways of life. We are told that traditional ethics governing outdoorings prescribes that the ceremony should be held on the 8th day after the child's birth. But since Efua and Araba are only interested in making money from the ceremony and are not devotees of Africa's traditions, the outdoorings was held earlier on the 5th day which happens to be the end of the month – pay day. Another crucial violation of the ceremony is that the customary libation is never offered to ancestral spirits, showing that these westernized characters have adulterated the ancient ritual. Worse than this, “the traditional” gift to the child turns out to be a fan – an European object which has no traditional value. Significantly, it is the draught produced by the brand new fan which ironically makes the child sick – a “cargofied malady” which finally kills him.

The undercurrent of “been-toism” is that the been-to comes back with cargo, but he himself returns as an ancestral spirit or a ghost – a cargofied ideological tenet which denies his humanity and converts him into a mere conveyor of goods. But Naana’s vision does not perceive Baako as a ghost. Rather, “she sees him,” according to Rosemary Colmer in her “The Human and the Divine”(1980:81), “as a child reborn ... entering afresh on the cycle of life, and asking questions ....” about his mythic odyssey. To Naana, therefore, Baako’s departure is a death which will lead to a reincarnation or a rebirth. This conflicting interpretation of Baako’s journey is revealed by Armah’s own words as follows: “In many ways the been-to cum ghost is and has to be a transmission belt for cargo” (p. 157). Baako sees himself as the society projects him: the extraordinary hero whose death transforms him into a cargo conveyor belt which brings wealth to his family. But Naana, on the other hand, perceives Baako’s return as a spiritual rebirth, the homecoming of an ancestral spirit into the world of the flesh. Thus the gift which Baako brings back from the USA is not material wealth but spiritual wealth.

Significantly Ghana and the entire Africa appear to confirm this precondition: the crass

materialism of the African elites and the pervasive decay. Juana discovers that malaise, the sickness and the suffering of the masses exist in the town and throughout the rural areas. This view is confirmed by the sentences: "She [Juana] had been into the countryside and there seen a kind of destruction that made people look to the grinding town as if some salvation could be found there. In the countryside things were worse. So the root of the trouble was deeper" (p.15).

The most graphic evidence of the compulsive consumption of European goods and Eurocentricism is the outdoor ceremony incident, which Armah eclectically manipulates. The whole ceremony becomes an occasion to show off European ethos and Euro-American material acquisitions. This is graphically revealed through the bizarre behaviour patterns of the guests – weird European affectations we might call the psychological maladies resulting from the Black elite's dependence on the Euro-American and the West for survival. Thus the narrator's microscopic detailing of the outdoor guests reveals that "This was a rich crowd of guests, too, sitting at first like a picture already taken ... the sweat called forth new white handkerchiefs [sic] [handkerchiefs] brought out with a happy flourish, spreading perfume underneath the mango tree..." (p.181). The crowd behave like new Europeans. This view is substantiated by the fetishistic celebration of Euro-American mannerism.

To drive home the intended message, the narrator focuses on what he contemptuously described as "important crossed legs", intertwined fingers held in front of restful belly". The text strains to detail out how these aspirants to the square, the fountain of power and wealth, set out to flaunt ostentatiously the European cargo they have acquired, some of which might have been borrowed. At least we know that Efua and Araba have borrowed the shining plates and cutlery they use at the outdoor ceremony. There is evidence to suggest that the corollary to cargo cults and been-toism is *the cult of being seen looking like a Euro-American*. That Armah sees fit to explore how the wealth and the power acquired by the successful climber must be boastfully exhibited underpins the importance of the psychology of neo-colonialism in the novel – a theme of the mimicry of Eurocentricism resurfaces repeatedly not only in Armah's postcolonial fiction but also in his two novelistic histories. In *Two Thousand Seasons* Prince Bentum is sent into the slave castle to receive European education and is baptized and renamed Bradford George while Kamuzu not only seizes the leftovers of the European Governor but strains to ape him. The

political power and wealth acquired by the extraordinary heroes must be ostentatiously and thoughtlessly displayed with an maximum obeisance to the West. This view is substantiated when we analyse the appearance and the behaviour patterns of the guests invited by Baako's mother and sisters to outdoor ceremony of Baako's newborn nephew. The cheeky narrator tells us that taking out the "perfumed handkerchief" from the pocket needs to be done exactly like the Euro-American or how the been-to does it: with "a happy flourish". Witness for instance in attendance is "a magnificent sane man in a university gown" – a "new European" intent on putting on display his acquisition of "the Golden Fleece".

It is this ritual which Efua and Araba, Baako's mother and sister, respectively foul – an adulteration which Armah exploits in his attempt to underpin the perversion of African traditional values. This prostitution of the outdoor ceremony is the most powerful event which best reveals the demise of African aboriginal ways in Armah's novel. The entire solemn ceremony has become a vehicle for displaying European-acquired material goods. As if this is not enough, when the baby dies from cold draught contracted from the new fan bought for the occasion, Efua and Araba use this occasion to flaunt their Europeanization on the obituary page of the local newspaper. That these two women are engaged in what I call "the cult of being seen as a Euro-Americans" is captured by the obituary which reads as follows:

A month today, dear angel,  
Cruel Death took you from our hands,  
The blow was hard, the tears bitter.  
You will never leave our hearts  
Till once again we are all united  
In the bosom of our Lord.  
Rest in peace, dear Child,  
Bye Bye  
CHIEF MOURNERS: Mrs Efua Onipa, Certified Teacher,  
Radiantway International School  
Mr Baako Onipa, BA, Senior Officer  
Ghanavision  
Mr Kwesi Baiden, Technical Staff  
Volta Aluminium Company, Tema (187-188)

At issue here is not their grief at the death of the child but rather the need to be seen as Westernized and sophisticated: that they are civilized enough to be aware of the Euro-American

tradition called the issuing of an obituary. The most significant point to be made, however, is the opportunity the child's death offers them to display their social status: their qualifications and official positions. Araba and her mother, Efua, have killed Baako's nephew because they turn him, like Baako, into a cargo transmission machine. In spite of the fact that the poor child returns to the spirit world from where he has travelled into the "cargofied" world of Africa, his death is still exploited to magnify the empty status symbol of the Onipa family.

Another major theme generated by the outdoorings narrative is the subject of the prostitution of African traditions, a theme which resurfaces in most of Armah's novels. Thus in *Two Thousand Seasons* King Koranche spurns Akan traditional initiation and sends his son, Prince Bentum, who is later baptized and renamed George Bradford, to be educated in the slave castle at Paono. The theme resurfaces in *The Healers* when the Fante chiefs Anglicize their surnames. Armah's exploration of the disintegration of indigenous values appears to have reached its pinnacle in *The Healers*. Similarly in *Fragment* Armah gives the topic a multi-dimensional treatment when he manipulates the grotesquely clothed guests at the outdoorings ceremony and the Ghanaian women's addiction to bleaching their skins with skin-lightening cream, AMBI-EXTRA. This theme is initiated in *The Beautiful Ones* when Estella, Koomson's wife, reveals her obsession with wearing wigs and preferring imported liquor to local one. The only novel in which this topic is not treated is *Why Are We So Blest?*. Linked to this theme of adulteration of pristine rituals is what we might call the demise of the traditional African woman's innocence and traditionalism. The accusation of traditional African woman losing his innocence projects the notion of traditional African woman as a static personality which is fossilized and embraces the attributes of primitive Africa without the changing influences of modernity. This patriarchal notion of the African womanhood is somehow rejected in *Two Thousand Seasons* in which women are empowered and their secondary status is seriously questioned.

We are told that to ensure that Araba's husband, Kwesi agrees to hold the outdoorings ceremony prematurely on the fifth day, she intends to use "bottom power": she plans to starve him sexually if he does not agree to the proposal. In Africa, this kind of open discussion of sexual exploitation with both her mother and brother is regarded as crude and anti-traditional, if not as a taboo.

"But are you sure Kwesi will agree?"



"I'll make him agree."

"How?"

"I have my secret weapon."

Araba pointed in the direction of her genitals and said languidly,

"Here."

"... You know, the midwife says Kwesi should leave me alone for two months. If he doesn't agree to the things I'm going to ask for, I'll add another month. Think of his big *kojo* going hungry for three long months." (p.89)

Armah's positive portrayal of women and his self-conscious attempt to restore the mutilated image of African womanhood in *Two Thousand Seasons* is only partially absent in his postcolonial novels when we consider Juana's dominant role in *Fragments*. Significantly, the crucial role of the focalizing influence Armah gives to Juana and Naana appears to subvert his negative fossilized portraiture of Efua, Araba and Akosua Russell. It is difficult to account for this ambivalence towards women in this novel. In her article entitled "Parasites and Prophets: The Use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels" (1986) Abena P.A. Busia asserts that "women in Armah's novels never have roles independent of the novel's hero or protagonist – always a man in a male dominated society. Women are always the lovers, wives, or blood relatives of the central characters" (Busia, 1986:89; In C. B. Davies & A. A. Graves, eds. *Ngambika*). In *Fragments* Juana's independent role in the narrative and Baako's dependence on her for the restoration of his sanity and Araba Jesiwa's dominant role in *The Healers* appear to challenge this critical formulation.

We cannot discuss the psychology of neo-colonialism without mentioning the character named Henry Robert Hudson Brempong, Armah's chief vehicle in exploring this theme. His initials, H.R.H., parodies the British royal title, "His Royal Highness", while his surname Brempong means "nobility or royalty" in Akan. Armah is again manipulating the creative technique of character-naming in this novel just as he has done in naming Solo Nkonam, Modin Dofu and Aimee in *Why Are We So Blest?* Even the name Baako Onipa is not just a name, but rather it is self-consciously designed to act as a chorus to the deeper insights of *Fragments*. Thus Baako, in Akan, means "one" while Onipa means "human being or humanity." Thus Baako Onipa may be loosely translated as "one humanity", which sharply throws into bold relief the theme of fragmentation and, of course, the title of the novel: *Fragments*. This is how Armah introduces Brempong, whom the degenerate society of Ghana treats as the real hero, to the reader:

The man [Brempong] moved closer, turning his seat as he did so, and held out his hand.

"Brempong is my name", he said. "Henry Robert Hudson Brempong [H.R.H]" "Baako"

"Is that your Christian name or your surname?" Brempong asked.

"No Christian name," said Baako. "I'm not a Christian."

"You know," said Brempong, "you know, your other names." He chuckled, a bit uncertainly, at the end.

"Onipa."

"It's an unusual name," Brempong said.

"My family name," said Baako. "I think of it as a very common name myself" (p.43).

Brempong, the devotee of the cargo mentality, is totally parodied. He regards his bombastic name as the ultimate achievement of Europeanization and therefore does not understand why a been-to like Baako should have such an unambiguously African name: Onipa Baako, which reveals no element of contact with Euro-Americans. That is because the first evidence of civilization and sophistication in Africa is the adoption of a European first / Christian name and or the Anglicization of African surnames – an obsession Armah sneers at in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. Brempong self-consciously organizes his very existence and his life around the axes of Eurocentrism and the cult of being seen as a Euro-American. It is not surprising, therefore, that during the airport red-carpet reception given to him by his relatives, Brempong is referred to as "Our white man" (p. 56). Robert Fraser explicates the reception accorded Brempong at the airport, arguing that it is akin to the praise singing showered on a traditional chief by the griot. Brempong, therefore, epitomizes the new royalty in postcolonial Africa. Fraser (1980:33-34) notes that "A travesty of traditional panegyric, it [red-carpeted reception] tells us much about the way in which a whole society has been weaned into regarding its *evolue* children as semi-divine figures". The significance of Brempong in Armah's scheme of things is highlighted by Lazarus as follows:

His [Armah's] chief vehicle is the character Brempong. Although Brempong has not attended the outdoor ceremony just alluded to, he would have been very much in his element there, for he is a man whose every mannerism feeds on Western ethos. The cult of conspicuous consumption obviously entails the aspect of *being seen* and Brempong is portrayed as a formidable devotee of the cult of *being seen*. He is, as Joe Lurie has written, "a **walking caricature of a European**".

(Lazarus, 1990: 86)

Intent upon etching out Brempong as the perfect impersonation of the Euro-American which he strains to project to all and sundry, the narrator piles detail upon detail on Brempong's parodied version of the European personality. Using Baako as the focalizer on the flight from Paris to Accra, Armah explores Brempong's devotion to the cult of being seen as a been-to or Euro-American. We are told that "The black man in the wool suit [Brempong] made several trips to the rear of the plane and back to his seat, his movements as well as the smile on his face exuding an irrepressible happiness, as if in the atmosphere of the plane he had found an element that suited him completely, and he needed to let everyone and everything around him know this" (p.42). The display of ostentation and the "cargofied" portraiture revealed by Brempong's psychological dependent-inducing mimicry of the West make him the perfect representative of the "new Black Europeans". As Baako observes when the plane lands in Accra, Brempong is met at the Kotoka International Airport by an enthusiastic group of relatives and friends. These give Brempong – whom a cynical defeated old woman pushed out of Brempong's limousine calls a "swollen peacock" (p.59) – a "red carpet VIP reception" in which champagne is drunk and toasted to welcome the extraordinary hero. Brempong is made to walk over a rich kente cloth spread for that purpose by his sister. Baako on the other hand is met by nobody and has to spend his first night in his own country like a stranger. This lonely first night in Ghana becomes the kernel of the rest of the novel, which is dogged by cosmic alienation and unrelieved agony.

The picture becomes more labyrinthine when we compare the Principal Secretary of the Ghana civil service with Brempong. Brempong is a businessman and the Principal Secretary is a Civil Servant. In spite of their differences in work situations and social status, both men display what Lazarus calls "a residual slave mentality, manifesting itself in a fawning sycophantic deference towards the West" (Lazarus, 1990:92). The manipulation of external physical manifestations as an index of moral deformity comes into play in Armah's portrayal of the Principal Secretary. The narrator describes him as:

... a corpulent man who laughs a lot and seemed really to enjoy doing it. He looked young, probably less than forty, and during the course of the evening he seemed unable to make up his mind whether to call Ocran *akora* or master ... his house, a large new two-storey building [is] in the shadow of the red triangle of lights made by the warning beacons on the grid towers at Broadcasting House (p.82).

The Principal Secretary's calling Baako a "schoolboy" though he is a grown-up man not only reveals his egomania but also his role as black slave factor who refuses to accept Baako's identity as a human being. The second reference to the image of obesity – "In several minutes only one car passed that way, a gray Mercedes with some plump-cheeked official in the back of it" (p. 73) – suggests that the use of the word "corpulent" to describe the Principal Secretary is a self-conscious decision demanded by Armah's creative purpose. The first statement this "man of substance" makes when he sees Baako is "So ... this is our returned schoolboy who doesn't know the ropes, eh?" (p. 82). Ocran counters the Principal Secretary's statement with "Those people at the Civil Service Commission are giving him the runaround [green horn initiation?], and there's no reason. He's a very capable man, and he's qualified" (p. 82). To Ocran's criticism of the system which obviously does no work, the Principal Secretary defends the rotten setup by arguing that:

"We don't have modern systems here. This country doesn't work that way. If you come back thinking you can make things work in any smooth, efficient way, you'll just get a complete waste of your time. It's not worth bothering about" (pp. 82-83).

At issue here is the vision that the postcolonial governments of Africa, which Africa's leaders boast of creating, is nothing but the colonial administrative and political structures handed-down to them by their former colonial masters. It is these outmoded colonial governments which nourish neo-colonialism in Africa. Hence the African leaders moved on to consolidate and preside over these colonialist-oriented governments of independent Africa. In this outdated political system, merit and qualifications don't count; what counts is whom you know and how adept you are at bribing your way through the network of grasping and corrupt government officials. The Principal Secretary's comment – words from the horse's own mouth – anticipates Baako's eventual failure at rendering civic-minded service to the larger community and Ocran's warning of Baako's possible failure since team work does not work in Armah's Africa. This accounts for Ocran's one-man show in sculpture. But Baako's screen productions need the co-operation of other workers, a co-operation no one is willing to give him, hence his resignation from Ghanavision and his burning up of his scripts. Reacting rather furiously to having to fawn before the Principal Secretary in order to get Baako a job at Ghanavision because the rotten civil service establishment does no work, Ocran declares that:

I hate these stupid Ghanaian big shots. They know things don't work, but they are happy to sit on top the mess all the same. Now he feels he's done us a great favor and that's the way he wants it. You're expected to be grateful. The machinery doesn't work, except as a special favor for special cases (p. 84).

The need to ask for favour from senior officials you know creates the atmosphere conducive for junior officials to demand bribes before rendering services for which they are paid with the tax payer's money. Armah extends his castigation of African leadership's dependence on neo-colonialism to safeguard their privileged position to include the betrayal and the sterility of Africa's intelligentsia. Besides Brempong and the Principal Secretary, there is Asante-Smith of Ghanavision, Baako's boss, who is the perfect example of an African intellectual. We are told that Asante-Smith's hypocrisy, incompetence and cowardice are known to Brempong. It is crucial for the development of the theme of neo-colonialism and cargo mentality that Brempong, the supreme head of the cult of being seen, knows Asante-Smith well. It is interesting to note that by some weird coincidence Kofi Awoonor, who used to be known as George Awoonor-Williams and was the Managing Director of Ghana Film Corporation at the time Armah wrote *Fragments* and had, like Armah's fictional character, Asante-Smith, a double-barrelled surname which is made of Ghanaian and European surnames. Brempong describes "Asante-Smith to Baako with great admiration mixed with contempt as a man with a flair for flattery and bootlicking:

Of course ... a person like Asante-Smith, knows people. Besides, he is clever. One of his own drinking friends says he has the sweetest tongue in all Ghana for singing his master's praises. It's the truth. And it doesn't matter to him even when the masters change. He can [still] sing sweetly for anybody who *de for top* (p. 46).

At stake here is a confirmation of the Principal Secretary's explication of the neo-colonialist administrative structures in place all over Africa. The systems rely solely on fawning slave culture: the ability not only to bribe and hero-worship those in authority to get things done, but also to be an expert in grovelling. Ocran's and Baako's need to see the Principal Secretary, who quickly sanctions Baako's employment at Ghanavision after Baako himself has tried futilely to get the job and Ocran's comment on the event endorses this interpretation. The angry Ocran asserts that "The place [Civil Service or rather Ghana] is run by this so-called elite of pompous asses trained to do nothing. Nothing works ... There are dozens of organizations, supposed to take care of this and

that ... [In spite of this] you keep getting pushed into using personal contacts" (pp. 81-82). Unless you bribe the Civil Servant, you get nothing done and your last resort is to seek the help of an important top official personally known to you. Confirming the above critical formulations about the callousness, cynicism and the political ineptitude of the African elites M. M. Mahood declares in her "Review of *Fragments*" that *Fragments* is "the sharpest indictment yet in fiction of the new African elite" (Mahood, 1970:40).

When we first meet Asante-Smith it is in connection with Baako's attempt to have produced two screenplays he has written for television. At a management production meeting, Asante-Smith stops Baako's presentation of the scripts on the grounds that they are too abstruse and irrelevant to contemporary Ghana's needs as a developing nation. Asante-Smith argues that Ghana has a "glorious culture" which must form the basis of TV productions and not slavery, which belongs to the past and not to the postcolonial Ghana. Baako counteracts this with a retort: that "Slavery is a central part of that culture ..." (p. 147). Commenting on Asante-Smith's attitude to Baako's screenplays, Lazarus reports that "Asante-Smith's attitude reveals Armah's major concern: Asante-Smith's abdication of responsibility as an intellectual" (Lazarus, 1990:94).

Baako's screenplay, *The Brand*, which Asante-Smith rejects, is self-consciously designed to deal with the kind of intellectual arrogance displayed by Asante-Smith and other African intellectuals. The title of the script is taken from the Ghanaian nationalist educationist Dr Kwegyir Aggrey's statement about his own educational rite of passage: "I am a brand plucked from the burning" (p. 147). As Lurie has aptly suggested "The branded elite, those whom Western education has favored by plucking them from the suffering masses, rise to their position in the name of liberating the masses below" (Lurie, 1973:32). But Baako says he intends to probe the misguided assumptions upon which the idea of education rests and Armah exploits the African slave factorship. As Baako puts it to the insensitive production meeting which callously rejects Baako's two screenplays, *The Root* and *The Brand* – a rejection which triggers his resignation and his madness. Baako tells the production committee that he is interested in investigating this naive assumption of the idea of education: "So ... this Aggrey kind of attitude is important. The educated really thinking of the people here as some kind of devils in a burning hell, and themselves the happy plucked ones, saved" (p. 147).

Like Mansa Musa 1 of Ancient Mali, whom Armah savagely disfigures in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the novelist also isolates Dr Kwegyr Aggrey, who was Kwame Nkrumah's teacher and mentor at Achimota College, for vilification and status reversal in *Fragments*. As Asante-Smith reminds Baako, Dr Aggrey was the "Grandfather of the nation" and "also the founder of my old school, Achimota. Yours, too, I hear, Mr Onipa" (p. 146). "The famous Aggrey of Africa", whose story of "The Hunter and The Eagle" accounts for the appearance of the eagle – the king of the plumed kingdom – on Ghana's national emblems, has been immolated by the status-reversal power which shapes and informs Armah's novels. "The Hunter and the Eagle" folktale will be dealt with below. Dr Aggrey has taken his rightful place upon the rostrum of the infamous: the legendary emperors, kings, nationalist heroes and revolutionary nationalist liberation leaders whom Armah disembowels in his five works as Black slave factors. Like the reduction of Emperor Mansa Musa's legendary golden pilgrimage to Mecca to "a journey of a moron" in *Two Thousand Seasons* and the reversal of the Fante kings' and the Asantehenes' glorious Akan image in *The Healers* to despotic degenerates who wallow in slavery and human sacrifices, Dr Aggrey's position as a famous African educationist is deflated. The cycle of slavery with all its degrading attributes is no respecter of persons. Dr Aggrey has become "a slave brander in the slave factory". But the word "brand"/ "brander" is loaded with ambiguities. The famous educationist is not only "the slave factor" who has made it to Olympus but is also the African genius who has moved from Tartarus/ "the communal dirt" to Olympus and has made the mythical Valhalla his permanent abode. He is a shining example to other initiates in the slave factory. Dr Aggrey has eclipsed all slave factors: he has become John, "the slave-driver", in *Two Thousand Seasons*; he brands slaves (p. 118). It is not a mere coincidence that Armah's novel not only deflates this branded elite notion of Dr Aggrey but he also exploits and negates another folktale told by Dr Aggrey.

Dr Aggrey recounted a folktale in which a farmer caught a baby eagle and raised it with the farm's chicks. The baby eagle followed the mother hen and chicks wherever they went, believing itself to be a chick. One day a hunter saw the eagle, which had grown to adult size among the chickens, eating corn given to the fowls. He told the farmer that the eagle would finally discover its true identity as the king of the feather world and fly away. But the farmer disagreed with the hunter, arguing that he had trained the eagle as a chicken and it would never fly as the eagle does. So the



hunter took the eagle to the top of a hill and threw it into the sky and the eagle rediscovered his identity and soared away majestically into sky. That Armah exploits Dr Aggrey's folktale is validated by the rhetorical question posed by the narrator: "The eagle does not want to soar?" (p. 175). The insight Armah is straining to convey here is that although Baako is an extraordinary hero or a been-to who refuses to play the degenerate role carved out for him by the foul society – an action which might mean his refusal to soar like the eagle – there is the intimation that when the society is transformed the artist will discover its true identity and fly majestically again like the eagle in the folktale. What actually has happened to Baako, Armah suggests, is that in the United States of America he attained an expanded vision which separates him from the clan of been-tos. Caged in the asylum with other inmates, Baako explains to Juana, who wants to know why he has become deranged and roped in like an animal brought to the madhouse by his family. In response, Baako appropriately replies that he is incarcerated in the asylum because he "... forgot the cargo – swallowed it" (p. 190). Juana, who does not know anything of the Melanesian cults Baako researches, tells him not to shut her out and not to talk to her like a stranger. Armah presents Baako as a foil to Brempong, the classic symbol of cargo cultism.

The list of goods bought by Brempong and how he strains to make Baako, whom he has never met before, take stock of what he has personally bought and is taking to Ghana, makes him the supreme representative of the "cargo mania" and "the cult of being seen and known as a Europeanized personality. Brempong takes the liberty in chiding Baako for not carrying himself as a been-to. Accordingly he preaches to Baako: "... how you are dressed, how you walk – you don't give the impression that you know you're a been-to. When a Ghanaian [and we might add an African] has had a chance to go abroad and is returning home, it's clear from any distance he's a been-to coming back" (p. 47). Brempong literally calls Baako a fool when he declares that "You just have to know what to look for when you get a chance to go abroad. Otherwise you come back empty-handed like a fool, and all the time you spent is a waste, useless" (p. 45), for he knows that Baako has brought nothing home, apart from his typewriter, guitar and old shabby clothes. In his PhD thesis entitled *The Bourgeois Rebel: A Study of the Been-to in Selected West African Novels* (1977), Randall Louis Davenport confirms the above analysis of Brempong when he declares that "Brempong, the obnoxious businessman, who shares the return flight with Baako in *Fragments*, seems to base his entire existence on the acquisition of Western gadgets ..." (Davenport, 1977:85).

There are other aspects of Ghanaian structure in which Western neo-colonial control is visible. One such place is Ghanavision. Janet Scalter of the British Council, for example, has an overwhelming degree of authority over scripts. To confirm this view, let us cite what Lurie has to say on this subject. The American critic asserts that, in *Fragments*, “other aspects of Western control are suggested by procedures at Ghanavision studios where expatriates are given preference in job hiring over trained personnel and where Janet Scalter of the British Council has a shocking degree of influence over scripts” (Lurie, 1973:33):

A script on slavery has been done, accepted, approved, stamped and routinely filled. It would have gotten lost unused, except the Scalter woman saw it, said she liked it and decided to turn it into theatre. There was a white man in the script, the enslaver, helped by a bloated African chieftain and his trinket-wearing court of parasites. In the Scalter woman’s play the white man disappeared, to be replaced by a brutish whip-swinging African, and the whole thing became purely a free-for all among yelling tribal savages. It was duly filmed for Ghanavision (p. 132)

Ghanavision’s acceptance of the Scalter woman’s script not only reveals the continued European domination of Africa but also the perpetuation of a fawning slave culture. In *Fragments* Akosua Russel’s shallow poems also celebrate slave mentality which resurfaces throughout in Armah’s corpus. The poem entitled “The Coming of the Brilliant Light of the New Age to Amosema Junction Village” recounts the glory of a European who, aided by his Westernized African wife, brought the magic of European civilization and enlightenment to a primitive African village. Akosua Russell’s intellectual writing circle is nothing but a trashy caricature of slaves – a grotesque parody of writers who prostitute their talent for money. This view appears to be confirmed by Lawrence Boateng when he observes that the soiree “... has become a market where we’re all sold” (p. 115). Ocran appears to re-affirm Boateng’s comment when he declares that “that woman [Akosua Russell] arranges these so-called soirees for only one thing: to get American money for her own use” (p. 111).

The impotence and the absurdity of Africa’s intellectuals are evoked by the fact that the doyen of Ghana Arts, Akosua Russell, has neither inborn intellect nor the acquired knowledge to enable her to play the role of patroness of Ghana’s Arts and Culture. Lazarus provides a brilliant endorsement of this evaluation as follows: “In spite her high standing in the Ghanaian cultural establishment, her talent is minimal and her artistic integrity dubious to say the least” (Lazarus,

1990:90). Notwithstanding the banality of her appalling poem, we are told that it is “the most frequently anthologized West African poem”, having appeared in eight collections of poetry (p. 114). What the soiree event has proved to Baako is what he has suspected all along: that like the other aspects of Ghana’s and Africa’s life, the orientation of indigenous cultural productions is designed to cater solely for Euro-Americans. Like Asante-Smith, Akosua Russell has only one inborn talent: the gift of catering for the tastes of the omnipotents. The question which instantly comes to mind is what is the secret of Russell’s success?. Like Asante-Smith, Akosua Russell’s success springs from her ability to flatter her European donors. Armah self-consciously sets out to dramatize how Akosua Russell flatters the big shots into parting with their funds. We are told that over drinks at the soiree “She seemed to be searching the small crowd, and in a moment she was at it, embracing people, kissing cheeks, whispering words in ears, then shifting off” (p. 110).

If we pull the pieces of evidence on how the ruling elites and the intellectuals permanently foul Africa’s image and pride, one factor seems to dominate the rest as the fundamental root cause of Africa’s historical and existential derailment: their insistence on wallowing in slave culture and their dependence-inducing fawning orientation towards Euro-America. Armah lampoons African leaders for this deference to the West in *Why Are We So Blest?* as follows: “The main political characteristic of African leadership since the European invasion is its inability and unwillingness to connect organically with the African people because it always wants first of all to connect with Europe and Europeans” (p.221). The theme of the mystified bond between the African rulers, the ancient traditional kings and the contemporary leaders, and their old colonial masters and neo-colonial mentors can be traced to the origins of European and Arab slave trade in Africa. In *Fragments* this perception surfaces during the great debate between Asante-Smith and Baako on the relevance of slavery in Ghana’s and by extension Africa’s culture. Asante-Smith’s argument that Ghana and by implication African states “have inherited a glorious culture, and that’s what we’re here to deal with” (p.147) during the production committee meeting is counteracted by Baako’s retort: that the Middle Passage is an important facet of Africa’s heritage. This controversy between Asante-Smith and Baako about the relevance of slavery and servitude in contemporary Africa leads naturally to the theme of the Middle Passage in this novel and in Armah’s other four works. In *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah accuses the Nkrumah regime of perpetuating slave mentality. Like in *Fragments* the theme of the Middle Passage is treated in *Why*

*Are We So Blest* when Armah exploits Nkrumah's occupation of the slave castle in this novel. The histories have emerged as the novels which give the most complex rendition of the theme of slavery. In *The Healers* the author portrays the Asantehenes as the most thoroughly rotten slave kings of the African Continent. But the summation of the theme, however, is reached in *Two Thousand Seasons*. This recurring thematic concern underscores the structural unity of the novels.

Armah's disfigured portrayal of the educated elite in Africa owes a great debt to Frantz Fanon's chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) entitled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness". In this chapter Fanon mounts a vicious criticism of the weaknesses of the African elites, particularly, their parasiticism and their proclivity to mimic the European colonizers. Fanon argues that African national bourgeoisie is not only totally unimaginative but also uncreative:

The national bourgeoisie of under-developed countries is not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour; it is completely canalized into activities of the intermediate type. Its innermost vocation seems to be to keep in the running and to be part of the racket. The psychology of the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman, not that of a captain of industry ....

[The historic mission of the national bourgeoisie] has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the masque of neo-colonialism. The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent, and it will play its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner. But this same lucrative role, this cheap-jack's function, this meanness of outlook and this absence of all ambition symbolize the incapability of the national middle class to fulfil its historic role of bourgeoisie. Here, the dynamic pioneer aspect, the characteristics of the inventor and the discoverer of new worlds which are found in all national bourgeoisie are lamentably absent ....

Because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of the nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe. (Fanon, 1961:120-123)

This essay was written at the time when most African countries achieved independence and his criticism was intended to serve as a warning to African states. Like the senior civil servants in Fanon's crucial chapter, the senior civil servants in *Fragments* do nothing apart from occupying their positions and taking bribes. In Wright's words "The underdeveloped, uninventive middle

class elites who walk Fanon's pages step with ease into the shoes of Armah's drunken attorney-generals, brazen ministerial buffoons, crass television technocrats and self-worshipping artistic dilettantes. Here in plenty is the useless bourgeoisie which, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, indolently allows the economy to rot and is content to serve as a neo-imperial agent, protecting and profiting from the investments of the Western prototype which it caricatures" (Wright, 1989:36)

To sustain the holocaustic effects of slavery on Africa, whose cumulative multi-dimensional innovation reaches its zenith in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the novelist manipulates the Christianborg (slave) Castle which has become the proud residence of Ghana's Heads of State. The proprietorship exercised by the symbolic image of the slave castle is explicated by Juana, the descendant of slavery. It is significant to observe that the lining of the coastline of Ghana with slave castles does stress the immediacy of slavery in modern Ghana and by projection the rest of Africa. Exploiting Juana as the focalizer, Armah hammers home the presence of slave mentality in modern Ghana and the need to confront it:

Over in the far distance, she could see the white form, very small at this distance, of the old slave castle which had now become the proud seat of the new rulers, the blind children of slavery themselves. She knew it was no use asking anyone questions about that. No one seemed to need forgiveness, and that it was no use feeling sorry for oneself, for crimes borne by people with whom one identified. The real crime now was the ignorance of the past crime, and that, it seemed, would be a permanent sort of ignorance in places like this and places like home (p. 30)

As an outsider Juana is easily alerted to the weakness of the Ghanaian political establishment. Thus on commenting on the Ghanaian Head of State's use of the Christianborg Castle as the official residence of the President, Juana asserts poignantly that the refusal to acknowledge the duplicity of using the castle as the headquarters of Ghana's government stems from the fact that "... there were people [the Ghanaian political leaders] here who knew of the awfulness of the life around them, who had the power given them to do something to change all this, but who were, like people she had known at home and in all her travels, only concerned with digging themselves a comfortable resting place within a bad system?" (p.31). Unlike those who cannot see the continuation of slavery because of their own interest in manipulating the slave mentality of the populace or those who deliberately ignore it because it amounts to reliving a past which triggers

too much pain, Baako insists on fanning the fire of this traumatic and demonic experience. Armah magnifies the evil of slavery by writing a script for Ghanavision entitle *The Root* – a screenplay which, through a linkage of ingenious images, reveals the analogy between historical enslavement and bondage in Ghana. *The Root* suggests that ultimate reclamation of Africa still rests with the capitalist power of Euro-America.

Juana makes another crucial discovery besides the existence of servitude in contemporary Africa. She notices that the fire of revolutionary nationalism which Ghana is noted for during the era of Kwame Nkrumah is merely an illusion. This thesis becomes Armah's central preoccupation in *Why Are We So Blest?* and *The Beautiful Ones* and is treated vicariously in the other novels. Deploying Juana as the all-seeing inner gazer, Armah's narrator declares contemptuously that "None of the struggle, none of the fire of defiance, just the living defeat of whole people ... After such an understanding, peace should perhaps have come, but that was also impossible, with so many reminders around of the impotence of victims and of the blindness of those who had risen to guide them." (p.31). Juana appears to be suggesting that there is only a faint ray of redemption for Ghana and by extension, Africa.

Naana, Baako's blind grandmother, becomes the fountainhead of the old Africa who links the past, the present and the future. Using Naana as a creative vehicle, Armah succeeds in conveying the notion of life and death which are perceived as an endless cycle. In this work, Naana, the visionary old and blind woman, resolutely maintains that the birth of a new born baby constitutes a journey from the spiritual world into the world of the living. Death, therefore, according to Naana, is "*the end*" and *the beginning* (p. 20). The prophetic words of the all-seeing character, Naana, which open the novel, confirm both the return of Baako and the cyclic structural framework which links Armah's five works. Baako's return is doubted by visionless characters like Araba and Efua, Baako's sister and mother, but Baako's blind grandmother, who links the past and present, sees the future too:

EACH THING that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns round. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and in the whole great world all things are things. All that goes returns. He will return (p. 1).

I am here against the last of veils. I am ready. You are the end. The beginning.  
You who that goes returns. He will return (p. 201).

Colmer (1980:79) confirms the informing impact of Naana when she asserts that Naana is a vital force in *Fragments* and that “her emphasis on the spiritual changes the focussing of the novel from the mundane and temporal despair of *The Beautiful Ones* to a positive affirmation of a cyclic world”. The African culture and heritage in the novel is symbolized by Naana. In Naana’s old world the living are linked to the world of the spirits through the ancestors. Our birth, death, and rebirth are conceived as an endless cycle of travelling between the world of the living and that of the dead. Underscoring the proprietorship Naana – “the *alpha* and the *omega*” – exercises over the interiority of the novel, Lemuel A. Johnson argues that “Armah’s *Fragment* mutes the political thrust of the view to emphasize in the character of Naana the historical and cultural significance of the rites of passage” (Johnson: 1980:73). Also at stake here is Baako’s imminent return home from the United States of America – a homecoming Efua and Araba, Baako’s mother and sister, respectively, think will never happen. What is pertinent to this critique, however, is the fact that the recurring structuring motif which shapes and informs *Fragments* is the cycle.

In his *Reading the African Novel* (1987) Simon Gikandi differentiates between the circular movements which operate in *The Beautiful Ones* and *Fragments*. He argues that “the cycle of decay in *The Beautiful Ones* consumes itself, those trapped in it and those (like Rama Krishna) who have tried to escape from it; in *Fragments*, Naana’s cycle is redemptive in the sense that her death is a transition from a destructive social realm to one that fulfils her dream of being reunited with her ancestors” (Gikandi, 1987:85-86). What Gikandi has not added to Naana’s notion of conception-death-rebirth is the fact that death is also the beginning of rebirth. Derek Wright’s essay entitled “The Metaphysical and Material Worlds” (1985) also elucidates the cyclical patterning which informs the novel. Wright writes:

In *Fragments* wheels move within wheels through a web of simultaneous cycles. The traditional religious concept of a continuous circuit of passage through a world of ancestor spirits, into which this world’s dying are reborn and from which outgoing spirits become the material world’s new births, is given a warped parody in the ritual “death,” spiritualization, and ghostly return of modern Ghana’s cargo-bringers” (Wright, 1985:338).



The story opens with Naana, Baako's visionary grandmother, who is the symbol of African traditionalism. The opening paragraph of Armah's *Fragments* also substantiates, beyond any doubt, the view of my thesis that Armah's five novels are unified by their cyclical structural designs. The picture presented here of patterns of cycles exploited by Armah's novel looks more like a spiral than endless cycles. As Edward Lobb's "Armah's *Fragments* and the Vision of The Whole" (1979) represents it, "The image of the circle is, like most of the images in the novel, an ambiguous one. Circles represent perfection and eternity, but a closing circle suggests impending doom; a ring of men closes in on the dog Juana sees killed, and a similar circle closes in on Baako to take him to the asylum" (p.31 ). Ocran's anguished sculptures also form a circle" (Lobb, 1979:31). By manipulating paralleled cyclical events, Armah succeeds in sustaining his vision of the endless cycles of futility which perpetually dog Baako's existential odyssey. Perhaps I must add that most sustained exploitation of this cyclic technique appears to have reached its pinnacle in *Two Thousand Seasons*. It is clearly evident that Armah designs a cyclical time-reference and structure for *Two Thousand Seasons* in order to reinforce the cycle of betrayals, servitude, destruction and tyranny symbolized by Anoa's prophecy. The wheel of physical destruction and spiritual decay is fated to roll on. The process of moral putrescence and violence generated by slavery as portrayed by the novel and symbolized by Anoa's prophecy are, like the liminal period in initiation, inevitable. No one can transcend Anoa's prophecy.

The cyclic journeys of life which the characters have to endure generate a series of ironical reversals. It has become, therefore, crucial to explore how Armah manipulates irony in order to convey his vision of the absurdity and futility of human struggles. The major type of ironic inversion deployed by Armah is irony of character. Witness, for instance, Baako's meaningless existential striving. As a been-to equipped with superior skills and a degree from a USA university, Baako is expected to climb the white square and join "men of wealth and power" on top of "Mount Olympus", but this is not to be. Instead, he winds up in a madhouse in Accra. The climax of submitting the characters to ironical reversal is Kwame Nkrumah, the legendary Ghanaian nationalist's destination at the close of his political career. During the fight for independence in the Gold Coast, Nkrumah castigated the British and other European colonizers for the slave trade, but as soon as he gains independence, he boots out the British Governor-General from the slave fort by declaring Ghana a republic and occupies Christianborg Slave Castle

himself, after renovating it at the cost of two and half million pounds.

Armah also eclectically submits Brempong, a character who might be described as the walking parody of a European, into a positive ironic inversion. Although Brempong is the most disgusting character in the novel – a pompous hypocrite who should draw nothing but contempt from African readers – he is hero-worshipped and given “a red carpet” treatment on his return from Europe. In the latter category, Armah exploits situational irony. Araba, Baako’s sister, has had five *abikus* and is, therefore, thrilled that Baako’s homecoming has coincided with her giving birth to a baby boy. But as fate will have it, she and her mother, Efua, in their determination to turn the baby into a money-making tool and to show off their Euro-American acquisitions, put the five-day old baby under their new electric fan, killing him in the process. Even before the ill-fated outdoorings, Naana, the all-seeing eye grandmother defines the *abiku* child and foretells the impending tragedy as follows:

Often a quick child like that is only a disturbed spirit come to take a brief look and go back home. ... the child is only a traveller between the world of spirits and this one of heavy flesh ... he must be protected. Or he will run screaming back, fleeing the horrors prepared for him up here. (p. 97)

Araba’s agonized cycle of *abiku* needs further explication. Like Araba Jesiwa in *The Healers*, in *Fragment* Baako’s sister, Araba, is tormented by *abiku* because she is projected as a microcosmic representative of Mother Africa, which, as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* have shown, is trapped and suspended in the murky womb of “two thousand seasons of slavery”. The *abiku* motif also evokes the symbol of the Middle Passage, underpinning Africa’s entombment in the limbo world of bondage and past slavery. Araba recounts the five corrosive and horrific circuits of *abiku* she is doomed to suffer: “Do you know how many times I tried this child and failed ... Five times ... I would carry him for months, and then just as I was getting happy thinking of myself as a mother, everything would pass away in such a river of bad blood I could have died” (p.85).

But what is never comprehended by Baako is that the fisher boy is given no fish and is pushed roughly away as soon as the rush by fish vendors begins and the fishermen are preoccupied with selling the fish and making money. The fisher boy’s destiny anticipates Baako’s failure in

Ghanavision. Baako's problems begin when his family wants him to play the second version of the myth of the extraordinary hero, the *been-to*, who sacrifices his own personal ambitions and integrity in order to use his skills to exploit the community so that the family can enjoy wealth and power. What Baako's family wants is Baako to become like Brempong, the extraordinary hero par excellence. While Baako is entombed in the asylum, he is visited by Juana and Ocran and it transpires that Baako has told Ocran he is contemplating turning himself into a Brempong. Ocran asks Baako:

"Did you really mean what you said last time, about wanting to be like that man in the Bank, and the Productivity bureaucrat – what the hell is his name?"

"Brempong".

"Well, do you?"

"I have to be. I wouldn't be here if I'd known that. That wouldn't be a crime".

"You can't be like them. You make me think of Akosua Russell when you talk of those people ..."

If that's all the usefulness you think of. We all have relatives who want us to be like your Brempong – get them things that shout they're rich, they are powerful ..."

I suppose you're right in not blaming them for wanting things. But it's senseless to get sick because you can't help them get what they want" (pp.192-193)

Ocran strains to explain to Baako his problem. Baako's ex-teacher tells him that people like Brempong are no danger to him. The people he must fear "are the impotent ones" like his family members. "They also want the same things but don't know how to cheat their way to them. You're just someone they'd like to use to get what they want. Is that what you want to be?" (p. 193). The crime Baako has committed and for which he is chased, caught and roped like an animal and finally entombed in the Accra madhouse, is the crime of refusing to "rob" society so that his family could lead the life of the rich and famous. But, as Armah has insisted, Baako, the *been-to*, is unable to soar like the eagle in Aggrey's folktale (p. 175), because he has rejected the perverted version of the extraordinary hero, which is centred around cargo cultism. In spite of Baako's insistence in playing a spiritual role as civic-minded creative artist committed to empowering the dispossessed masses, the Onipa family, in exception of Naana, refuses to perceive him as an individual. Gerald Moore explicates not only Baako's dilemma but also his role as a *been-to* in his "The Writer and the Cargo Cult" (1972). Moore writes: "Any deviation from the course normally pursued by a 'been-to' (Senior Service job, car-full, fridge-ful and, most vital of

all, cash-full) must appear to them [relatives] as dangerously abnormal and perhaps insane" (Moore, 1972:75).

To put it differently, Baako, the Promethean hero, insists on being "a reverse crossover", the human god which leaves Tartarus for Mount Olympus where he is assured of an everlasting life of opulence and power but chooses to leave the mythical paradise for "the plains of mediocrity" in order to join the masses wallowing in "the communal dirt". What drives Baako insane is the pull between the two versions of the myth of the extraordinary hero. In the original myth the hero defeats an external enemy and brings wealth and victory for the enjoyment of the larger community while in the perverted version the hero robs the larger society so that his family can enjoy the fruit of the plunder. The fundamental cause of Baako's madness, however, is conflicting interests of his family and the larger community, his failure to empower the masses and the guilt he feels for not exploiting the larger community for the benefit of his relatives. Of course, the whole rotten political structure of Ghana, coupled with Asante-Smith's refusal to have his screenplays produced, is the immediate major factor which triggers Baako's madness. Lurie elucidates this view when he argues that "Baako's conflict is not between tradition and modernity; rather, it is between the irreconcilable demands of his family and the larger needs of the society as a whole" (Lurie, 1973:39).

This critical investigation cannot be complete without an analysis of how Baako's chase through the streets of Accra, which culminates in his final entombing in the asylum, is re-enacted by other similar events which either anticipate or echo Baako's final destination. In her "The Characterization in Soyinka and Armah" (1977) Kathleen Staudt reports that "Armah uses an anticipatory time framework in *Fragments*; early events foreshadow later occurrences in the novel" (Staudt, 1977:68).

The most graphic of these incidents is the killing of a mad dog. The theme of madness is sustained by Armah's exploitation of two other incidents which deal with mad men. In Paris Baako sees a mad Frenchman and similarly Baako and Juana see a mad man after Skido is crushed to death while trying to rush his food-laden truck into the ferry in northern Ghana. Baako's mental derailment is foreshadowed when Juana witnesses the killing of a mad dog. The dog is described

as “shivering” (p. 16) with cold in spite of the day’s unbearable heat. The dog’s futile search for warmth on the burning coal-tarred road evokes Baako’s agonized cosmic loneliness and his proclivity to seek warmth from Juana:

... Juana saw there ... a shivering dog in the middle of the road. On this hot Atlantic day there was something inside the dog making him so cold he seemed to be searching for the whole feel of the road’s warm tar under him, and he was turning round and round in circles trying to reach and touch the tar with every bit of skin he had all in one impossible movement his limbs and bones were not soft enough to give him. (p. 16)

The “man with swollen scrotum”, who smashes the mad dog’s head with a pickax, we are told thereafter, “was twitching no longer” (p.19). Then comes the ironic inversion: the drip of blood from the “murdered” dog is ingeniously linked to a mysterious drip from the man with the swollen sac, the dog killer. The narrator tells us that “from the man himself something else had commenced to drip: down along his right leg flowed a stream of something yellow like long-thickened urine mixed with streaks of clotted blood. A look of terror stopped the man’s triumph as he first felt the drip ...” (p. 20). The ritual killing of the achieves two results. Firstly, “The man with a scrotal sac is liberated” (Gikandi, 1987:89) from his malady emanating from his swollen balls – a psycho sexual release. Secondly, the dog killing episode etches out a backdrop against which Baako’s madness may be analysed. Just as a bunch of ruthless men isolate the dog from its only friend, the little boy, the brutal society ruled by corrupt politicians and inhabited by greedy relatives obsessed by European ethos separate Baako from Juana. The dog is killed because it is reported to be mad, and Baako, before his incarceration in the asylum, is roped in like a beast of burden because he too is perceived as possessing a bite that will cause lunacy (“His bite will make you also maaaaad!”, p.170). Walker confirms this view when he declares that “Baako becomes the mad dog who is relentlessly encircled by his society when his behavior appears dangerous” (Walker, 1975:116). What is crucial, however, is how the memory of the killing of the mad dog is kept alive.

My concern here is how Armah exploits the technique of using various creative ploys in sustaining Baako’s theme of parasiticism which is bred by the cargo mentality and the myth of extraordinary hero whose activities are supposed to bring wealth and power to his family. To put it in other

words, Armah creates a series of parallel events to Baako's agonizing rite of passage, which act out Baako's journey of life, generating an eclectic dimension in the novel. This creative technique can be traced to the novelistic histories too. In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah evokes the theme of parasiticism by exploiting how King Koranche sells the initiates into slavery so that he could indulge his addiction to European hot liquors. Similarly in *The Healers* Armah uses the demonic murder of Prince Appia by Ababio in order to capture the greed for power and the seduction by parasitic life of luxury.

Even Skido's horrifying death – a demise brought about by his attempt to rush his food laden truck unto the ferry – appears to replay the ineffectualness of the corrupt community in which officials (the police in this case) refuse to carry out their duties as long as they are not bribed (pp. 135-140). The narrator reveals that Skido has been crushed to pieces by his own vehicle because he “had fallen beneath his” huge truck full of foodstuffs. Baako tells the PWD resident engineer that the accident could have been prevented if the entrance to the ferry were narrower, making it impossible for two or more vehicles to rush through to the ferry at once. We also learn that Skido had been waiting for three days and became because the foodstuffs (in his truck) began to get rotten. The engineer's response to Baako's complaint echoes the cliché-laden complacent response of Asante-Smith to Baako's civic-minded attempt to empower the dispossessed masses: “a bit more patience” and he'd still be alive” (p. 139). In spite of the futility of Baako's existential odyssey, there is a faint ray of hope that there will be some measure of redemption. This view can be substantiated by textual evidence from the novel.

Efua, Baako's mother, takes him to her unfinished mansion which she had initially expected Baako to complete building on his return from the USA. As the narrator puts it, “... Efua was right to think of the returned one as fruit, ripe fruit of her womb. Seeing the other fruit grow ripper, watching hers turn green and hard and hurtful to the open consuming mouth ...” (p. 176) – a citation which echoes the image of “the monstrous fruit” from *The Beautiful Ones*, emphasizing my thesis of the thematic unity of Armah's novels.. Before taking Baako to the uncompleted mansion, she tries to reconcile herself to the idea that Baako will not be like Brempong. Thus Efua takes the guilty load off Baako by saying that:

“There are annoying things in this life here ... but we must find our happiness all

the same ... I have made a decision today. I'm cleaning my soul ... I was cursing you in my heart (p. 176).

But the redemption is not complete, for all Efua does is to transfer to Baako's baby nephew the burden of treating Baako as a cargo machine for bringing wealth to the Onipa family. This accounts for the baby's being turned into a money-making tool, a destructive responsibility which kills him. Wright partially endorses this interpretation when he declares that:

The flashback of the chapter 'Efua' offers a cautious glimpse of possible redemption. In this moving episode Efua takes Baako to the ruined foundations of her unbuilt mansion, where she formally lifts her curse on the son previously convicted of the 'refusal of ritual joy' at his homecoming and confessionally off-loads onto him, as priest-carrier, the accumulated burden of false hopes, material cravings and 'strange feelings' which he has inspired in her. Yet the purity of Efua's 'soul cleaning' is suspect because her relief at being lightened of the weight of her dreams is still mixed with regret that they could not be fulfilled.

(Wright, 1989:140).

Both Baako and his nephew become ritual carriers who bear the burden of the society's accumulated physical and spiritual burdens' "false hopes, material cravings and 'strange feelings'". In his article entitled "Tragedy of a Been-to" Martin Tucker elucidates Efua's destructive role in the novel. He writes:

One of the most significant agents in Baako's destruction is his mother. Her dreams of Baako's providing a car and a showy home for her are turned into the drab realism of his moving into her small house and taking the bus every morning to work like any African commuter. Finally and tragically she fails to understand Baako's dream of writing; when she discovers his journal and concludes that he is writing to himself, she rationalizes that he is mad, for only a sick man writes and speaks to himself. (Tucker, 1970:26).

Baako, therefore, receives no emotional support from his mother. It is left to Juana to play the role of both a lover and a mother. The most tangible hope of salvation comes from Juana. We are told that she is preparing a spare room in her house for Baako (pp. 190-194). This is conveyed by the sentence: "Walking around the house, she saw only lifeless things, till the idea came to her that she should begin preparing the unused room" (p. 194). This suggests that upon his release from the asylum Baako and Juana will be living together. The narrator also tells us that during



Juana's visit to the asylum towards the close of the novel, the ringing of the Roman Catholic Church bell triggers both hope and despair in the mind of Juana:

Over the wall the murmur from the cathedral swelled into a sung phrase that sounded at that distance like an inexorably rising cry, first pure, impossible longing, then the tearful pain of impending disappointment understood, open sounds of hope still continuing in the face of every despair, and a long note of calm at the end. The words in her own memory:

*Et exspecto  
resurrectionem motuorum  
Et vitam venturi saeculi  
Aaaaaamen* (pp. 193-194)

This enigmatic close of Juana's role in the novel suggests and confirms the text's exploitation of the myth of extraordinary hero and the Melanesian cargo cults which perceive the hero as a supernatural personage whose death brings the cargo to the living. The other aspect of the cargo cults is the death and the resurrection of the hero. Besides this, in Naana's old Africa, Baako's journey to the USA is perceived as a voyage into the world of the dead from which he is expected to be reborn. This perception accounts for Naana's view that in the USA Baako was a ghost and at the same time she insists that he will return. Naana tells us she sees "Baako roaming in unknown forbidden places, just born there again after a departure and a death somewhere ..." (p. 11).

In his review entitled "Armah's Second Novel" (1974:70), Gerald Moore re-affirms this interpretation when he declares that "Naana has thought back to the libation ceremony which preceded Baako's departure, and how the air then was fouled with the gross material expectations of his other relatives. Their beloved son was like a victim slain upon the altar of their desires, so that his ghost might return from over the water bearing rich gifts for the 'living'". Death as already mentioned is both an end and a beginning of the cycle of conception-death-re-birth which denotes, in the Christian mythology, the resurrection of the dead. This suggests that Baako's incarceration in the asylum amounts to death, an entombment. His release from the asylum, therefore, can be called a resurrection from the dead as epitomized by Juana's Roman Catholic background.

Naana whose vision of the continuous cycle of birth-death-rebirth opens the novel closes it too.

Naana's invocation – "Be kind to me: a new child coming back to you. You knew me ready to die again and enter this world those above here think real, this world which you know is only the passing flesh of everything that lasts ..." (p. 200) – links the opening paragraph and chapter 1 to the last paragraph and the chapter entitled "Naana". In Naana's world-view time is cyclical, uniting the living, the dead, and the yet unborn into one continuum. This satisfying and innovative ending of the novel is a powerful testimony of Armah's cyclic thematic preoccupation: his vision of Africa's senseless cycles of social and historical antithesis of wasteland versus faint ray of regeneration. The key to this ambiguity between destruction and renewal is invoked by Priestess Anoa's twin voices of "two thousand seasons of slavery (doom) versus the muted hope of emancipation in *Two Thousand Seasons*. This creative ploy is rehearsed in *The Healers* when the fragmented pieces of victims of Fante and Asante tyrannical rule are re-integrated and their unrelieved pains assuaged. Even in *Why Are We So Blest?*, a novel in which life has lost all its meaning, Modin's Promethean cross-over suggests that there is at least a regenerative option open the been-to or the extraordinary hero. And as we shall see in the chapter on *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, there is, notwithstanding the overwhelming pessimism, a faint ray of hope that someday the society will be transformed revolutionarily and "the beautiful ones" will be born.

## NOTES

1. In his work *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium* (London: Methuen, 1960), p. xviii, Kenelm Burridge records that "Almost always, in the van of a Cargo movement, urging the participants on, there is an individual who assumes the role of a leader, deliverer, or hero; who, as might be a messiah, parenetically tells of the wonderful days to come. Mambu was just such a man, a charismatic figure".

## Chapter Five

### Nationalist Leadership in African Liberation Politics Maligned: Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?*

In *Why Are We So Blest?* Ayi Kwei Armah not only targets the destructive alienating potentials of Western education in Africa but he also indicts the betrayal of the dispossessed masses by the leaders of revolutionary liberation movements in Africa. While in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* Armah repudiates African kings for their perpetration of tyranny, their culture of violence and their conversion of pristine values into vile instruments of absolute political control, in *Why Are We So Blest?* he continues his castigation of Africa's ruling elite but adds the intelligentsia (who now symbolize the royalty) and the leadership of the revolutionary liberation movements of Africa to the list of his satirical targets. *Why Are We So Blest?* is centred on three major characters, Solo Nkonam, an African from a Portuguese colony of Congheria, who was once a freedom fighter, Modin Dofu, a Ghanaian student at Harvard University and his German-American mistress, Aimee Reitsch, who is a student at Radcliffe and according to Alan Hislop's "Review of *Why Are We So Blest?*", is portrayed as "a frigid Radcliffe negrophiliac interested in revolution" (Hislop, 1972:8). Modin's Harvard thesis, which focuses on the *Maji Maji* rebellion initiated by the Tanganyikan natives in East Africa against German colonial atrocities (1905-1907), becomes the fulcrum around which this novel is structured.

There is a view which asserts that the novel appears to have – within the experiences of Armah's protagonists, Solo and Modin – possibly incorporated some of the experiences of Armah's own life in countries like France and the United States of America. In his "Ayi Kwei Armah in America: The Question of Identity in *Why Are We So Blest?*", O. S. Ogede confirms the connection between Armah's own life abroad and the experiences of his two African protagonists. Ogede asserts that "Armah's handling of the theme of [the] identity of the Black travellers in *Why Are We So Blest* indicates some connection between his own life abroad and the experiences of the two main Black characters in the novel ..." (Ogede, 1990:50). That Armah might have manipulated fictional and autobiographical material in crafting his novel is also re-affirmed by Dan Izevbye in his "Issues in the Reassessment of the African Novel" (1979). Izevbye contends that "*Why Are We So Blest?* seems to present autobiographical matter in a raw and untransformed state. We are constantly aware that the story is not wholly feigned, for the characters do not seem

to exist independently of the views held by their author” (Izevbaye, 1979:15). To translate his creative vision into fiction, Armah gives an exaggerated version of the personal experience of the attempts of two conscientious intellectuals who break away from the new ruling elites. These two protagonists leave their stations – the Harvard University and a liberation movement – during the struggles for independence in Africa in order to serve the communal interests of the disinherited populace whose lot remained unchanged in postcolonial Africa. Modin postulates that “The main political characteristics of African leadership since the European invasion is its inability and unwillingness to connect organically with the African people because it always wants first of all to connect with Europe and Europeans” (p.221). Neil Lazarus’s *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (1990) illuminates Modin’s view and my interpretation as follows:

Inferring that, to insure their success, the Western conspirators have always needed to “buy off” Africans in positions of power or influence, and to use these co-opted souls as a bulwark into the continent, Modin directs himself to the task of theorizing a relationship between Western domination and African betrayal. This becomes the subject of his senior thesis at Harvard. The thesis takes as its starting point the failure of African populations to break free from Euro-American hegemony, either during the era of colonialism or subsequently; and hypothesizes that African leaders have typically played a decisive role in determining these failures .... (Lazarus, 1990:141)

Lazarus highlights the nerve centre of black neo-colonialism in postcolonial Africa. According to Modin, the freedom struggles, which are conducted by revolutionary liberation movements in Africa in order to liberate the masses, tend to impose the old colonial class system upon the revolutionary cadres. Modin argues that the very methods through which emancipation of the masses is supposed to be achieved are ingeniously transformed into new mystified, covert imposition of hierarchical and class compartmentalization – more virulent forms of exploitation and subjugation. Instead of transforming the elitist interests of private glory and prestige and money into communal structures for the welfare of the larger society, the new systems are modelled solely for the benefit of the ruling class. This re-enactment of class-oriented society is codified by the Westernization programme generated by Western education. Thus the educated leaders of the revolutionary freedom movements are organized on elitist structures which turn the ordinary freedom fighters into servile men who are exploited and sent to the battle zone while their leaders remain behind and occupy themselves with office work. The outcome of this is that

while the leaders of the revolutionary liberation movements live in luxury, the fighting cadres subsist in endless poverty, best expressed as “the communal dirt”. Before we delve into the heart of this investigation, Armah’s canny and eclectic manipulation of the sexual relationship between the Blackman and the European woman needs to be analysed.

Armah manipulates with a consummate skill an allegorical technique based on what might be called “the politics of psycho-eroticism” – the multi-dimensional reaches of the sexual relationship between the Blackman and the white woman. Lazarus’s summary of the thematic concerns of *Why Are We So Blest?* endorses my critical viewpoint. In *Why Are We So Blest?*, Lazarus argues:

... Armah takes several of the pressing and unresolved questions that had animated *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* – questions concerning creative intellectualism in the context of neocolonialism, the alienation of radical intellectuals from their larger communities, the dispossession and consequent depoliticization of urban and rural masses in the postcolonial era, the exocentric and fawning posture of indigenous elites – and attempts to force them to definitive formulation ... At the heart of *Why Are We So Blest?* He installs a psycho-sexual-political allegory designed to represent not only the violent mechanics of the imperial subjugation and exploitation of Africa, but also the sadomasochistic and ultimately suicidal complicity of African intellectuals in this despoliation.

(Lazarus, 1990:117)

At issue here is the view that educated Africans who studied in Euro-American universities have been transformed into exploiters of the illiterate masses of Africa. They have become parodies of Europeans, whose first allegiance is to Euro-America and not to the poverty-stricken African populace. This theme stretches back from the first generation of colonial elite mostly made of lawyers who regarded their education as a means of getting closer to the white men, who formed the postcolonial elite – a thematic preoccupation which not only re-surfaces in all Armah’s fiction, but is given a dystopian and symbolic treatment in the first novel. Lazarus’s comment not only re-confirms Armah’s constant rehearsal of the dilemma of obtaining “the Golden Fleece” from overseas universities in the corpus but also reveals how the author has ingeniously exploited an enigmatic allegory grounded on a psycho-erotic-political paradigm in debunking Western Europe’s savage colonial exploitation of Africa. This addiction to European ethos resurfaces in *Two Thousand Seasons* when Prince Bentum spurns the local initiation school and is goes to England for education. This cultural pillage is fully supported by Africa’s leaders and intellectuals.

Armah portrays the European woman as the ritual carrier of Europe's centuries of rapacious and destructive colonization in Africa – the burden of moral pollutants which the European woman is made to bear on behalf of her race. Europe's representative is Aimee, who is projected as a human predator who has only one goal in life: excitement, which is largely sexual. Thus Aimee perceives Modin as the source of "fire", which, according to Joyce Johnson, Armah uses to denote two different meanings. Johnson (1982:507) asserts that "Armah uses the term 'fire' here to convey a double meaning. Fire is, of course, an agent for purifying and transforming things, but it is also, Monica Wilson has observed, a symbol for sex in Africa" (Wilson, 1971:57). Significantly, after going through a sexual circuit by sleeping with most of the political leaders, including the Prime Minister, Ndugu Pakansa, during her research trip to Kansa (Kenya?), the disappointed Aimee declares that "The fire doesn't exist anywhere. I'll always be bored" (p. 145).

The castigation of the West in the novel deals with the intense racism which plagues African students who go to Euro-American universities to study. Right from the beginning of the tale we are told that Modin is confronted by naked racism in the United States – a fictive experience which appears to be distilled from Armah's own actual racist experience in the United States of America. Commenting on the trauma of racism which confronts Solo in Portugal and Modin in the USA, Ogede asserts that "It is certainly not mere coincidence that in 1959, after his secondary school education at the Achimota College, Ghana, Armah had left for the United States of America, where he studied at Groton School in Massachusetts, and at Harvard. He could not complete his final year at the university because of his response, like Modin Dofu's at Radcliffe [Harvard], to white racism" (Ogede, 1990:51).

From the episodes recorded in his diary, Modin reveals that the members of the African Education Committee, whose Chairman is Mr Richmond Oppenhardt, try to impress upon him his exceptional mental superiority in contrast with the rest of Africa's populace, which is perceived by white America to be idiotic. Thus Mr Oppenhardt tells Modin: "All your confidential reports say you are a most unusually intelligent African – the most intelligent, as a matter of fact" (p. 120). All attempts by Modin to tell his USA sponsors that there are many African students more brilliant than he is brushed aside. Modin is, therefore, forced to accept the racist view that Africa is populated by imbeciles and that he is the exception to the general rule. Gradually, Modin comes

to a very radical assessment of the hidden agenda behind Western education in Africa. He discovers that the real intention of Western education and the aim of assimilation is make the African intellectual see himself naively as a super-hero who has successfully internalized the Western stereotyped image of the African intellectual. In this racist universal construct, the West/Euro-America becomes the Olympus of the universe and the non-Euro-American world is projected as the "plains of mediocrity", in other words "the communal dirt", otherwise known as "Tartarus" (pp. 100-101). The journey from the "barren land of the great 'unwashed'" (Lazarus, 1990:138), or the world's "periphery" (p. 33), leads naturally to modern slave factorship and the devastating alienation from aboriginal wholeness representing the uneducated masses of Africa. Armah appears to suggest that the strategy for this kind of mental enslavement is not only an indigenous-African-oriented education but also the empowerment of the illiterate African masses by the educated elite. To put it differently, the been-to must leave the Olympus to rejoin the masses in the communal dirt. Modin's diary captures this state of affairs as follows:

Elementary School. First gate, the millions already eliminated, leaving thousands. No justification. Just the way things are. The way things have been made.

Secondary School. Second stage. The thousands dropped, leaving hundreds. The justification: the exams. A lucky few get it because their relatives push them through in spite of everything.

Sixth form. The hundreds forgotten. A dozen here, twenty there. Small groups getting absorbed into European ways. The justification: a higher quality.

University. Single survivors in the last reaches of alienation. The justification: "You are the only one; "You are not like the others"; You are the first ..."

But it is these, the farthest removal from the living realities of the hundreds, the thousands, the millions, who are given power in the imperial system to regulate the lives of the millions, thousands, hundreds. (p. 224)

What is puzzling about Armah's condemnation of Western education, particularly the one received in Euro-America, is the fact that it was and is still considered by the majority of Africans as the best way of preparing Africans for the future development of the African Continent. The attendant alienation which accompanies this system of education is perceived as a necessary evil – the price Africa has to pay in order to acquire modern skills for its industrialization. Perhaps, I must add that Armah's position on Western education would not succeed in deterring Africans from going to Euro-American universities for higher studies. The theme of assimilation of European ethos by the Western-educated African or the thematic preoccupation which William Lawson aptly labels "the Western scar" in his work *The Western Scar: The Theme of the Been-to*



in *West African Fiction* (1982), Armah maintains, is the new mystified process of procuring modern native slave factors to subjugate postcolonial Africa. Commenting on this African proclivity and the dilemma of the been-to in his seminal work, *The African Origin of Civilization* (1974), Cheikh Anta Diop asserts that “those Africans ... who came to Europe [Britain]” to study “became more British than the British, just as many from what was French West Africa became more ‘French’ than the Frenchmen” (Diop, 1974:25). The novel’s iconoclastic demolition of the traditional African myth of “the Golden Fleece”, the fabulous status attached to university degrees acquired at Euro-American institutions, is lucidly conveyed by Lawson:

The been-to is no mythic hero in this work. He brings back no fire, no golden fleece for his people or himself. He does not extend the scope of their consciousness. On the contrary, Armah castigates the been-to in the most outspoken terms of any West African novel. The Western scar marks a fatal wound, Armah tells us. The conventional university training in the West is far worse than merely difficult experience for the young elite ... Further, Armah maintains that the been-to is a poor dupe who has been carefully selected by undefined, destructive western powers. His potential for Africa’s good has been subtly fashioned into an instrument of its continued economic and cultural destruction. (Lawson, 1982:112)

The anathema of Western education, particularly its corrosive inherent alienation, has led Armah to indict Westernized Africans as “privileged servants of white empire” chosen by an educational system which has been mystified “into an elitist ritual for selecting slave traders” (p. 222). Both Solo and Modin are been-tos and similarly, both have experienced the suicidal and the destructive potentials of Western education and the futility of Black-White relationship which is further magnified by the failures of their attempted intimate relationships with their white girlfriends. Accordingly, Modin contemptuously dismisses Western education as symbolized by assimilated Africans – an educational process which is still regarded by the entire continent of Africa as the key to Africa’s modernization and industrialization – as a betrayal by the African intelligentsia to which he belongs himself. In an unambiguously virulent repudiation, Modin hurls a brazen sneer at the African intellectuals as follows: “The educated Africans, the Westernized African successes are contemptible worms ... Happy to get the degrees, then go home and relax on the shoulders of our sold people. The end of Western education is not work but self-indulgence. An education for worms and slugs” (p. 161). Implied in this virulent ridicule is the indictment that the elites of post-independent Africa have collaborated with Euro-America in order to perpetuate the old

enslavement of the "Dark Continent" by using Western education as the modern covert instrument of servitude. The genesis of this "European ritual initiation [education]" is evoked in *Two Thousand Seasons* when King Koranche decides that all future heirs of the Anoa kingship should be trained in the slave castle by European slave traders. Hence Prince Bentum, the first royal initiate, is accordingly trained as a servant to wait on the Europeans and is then later sent to Europe where he is converted into Christianity with a new name, George Bradford, which is imposed on him. George Bradford's European education is crowned with his marriage to a frigid, half-deaf European woman. *Why Are We So Blest?* continues where *Fragments* leaves off – the theme of the myth of the extraordinary hero – the been-to: " ... the security thing. The degree puts me in the elite. Guaranteed income, perks, the whole rotten deal I tell myself I don't want" (p.91). The process of mystification and distribution of information employed by Western education, Armah insists, is a complex phenomenon:

... loneliness is an inevitable part of the assimilationist African's life within the imperial structure. Because of the way information is distributed in the total structure – high information in the center, low information on the periphery – overall clarity is potentially possible only from the central heights... Those who stay in the peripheral areas intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, totally, are not lonely. They are in touch with home, not cut off. The price they pay for not being lonely, however, is that they suffer the crudest form of manipulation, mystification, planned ignorance." (p.33)

Armah contends that, as long as the Western education process, which operates in Africa, continues in its present form, African intellectuals would not only be plagued by double-alienation, isolation from the masses and also the Euro-Americans, but they will continue to exploit Africa as slave factors for the benefit of European international capitalism. The theme of national political and personal psychic failure is rendered symbolically by Armah's ingenious naming of the characters and his exploitation of a psycho-erotic-political allegory. The cosmic alienation of the main characters from Africa – a pervasive isolation which is akin to physical and spiritual death – is sustained by the many creative ploys the author uses. The most eloquent evidence supporting the above view is in the choice of names Armah gives to Solo Nkonam. While "Solo" literally denotes "alone", the surname, Nkonam, in Akan, literally means "lonely stranger". Thus the names Solo Nkonam together signify double alienation as one of the central concerns of the novel. Similarly, the name, Modin Dofu self-consciously evokes the futile love theme exploited

by the novel. Modin Dofu, in Akan, means "I am called a man who loves". Likewise, the name Aimee in French means "One who is loved". In his discussion of the technique of African-fiction-naming in his essay "Naming and the Character of Africa Fiction" (1981), Dan S. Izevbaye argues that the creative device of naming characters in African novels is one of the important tools used by the novelist in building up his/her characters and conveying his/her vision. The critic adds that "There are a host of writers – Dickens, Hawthorne, Melville, Joyce, Faulkner, to name a few – whose suggestive naming of characters make the discussion of names an important part of the criticism of their work" (Izevbaye, 1981:163). Armah's suggestive naming of characters in *Why Are We So Blest?* makes character-naming in the novel one of the keys in unlocking the deeper insights of the text. The Modin-Aimee and Solo-Sylvia amorous relationship, therefore, invokes not only the symbolic interplay of alienation and eroticism that structures Armah's novel but also projects the view that Black-White love relationship only leads to self-deception and spiritual death. There is a critical opinion which perceives Armah's Manichean stance adopted in the novel to be both unrealistic and racist. To say that all white-black relationships will lead to failure amounts to a gross representation of reality.

Solo, the failed artist who puts together the diaries of Modin, Aimee and his own, could be perceived not only as the editor of these writings but also as the surrogate author of the novel. One is even tempted to see Solo and Modin as Armah's split personas. Solo's editorial hand is revealed by the following diary entry entitled "Solo":

The entries in the African's book do not all bear dates. The things he wrote of were in general not events; they were more like concatenations of ideas. Some I have not understood at all. The greater part have a meaning outside the final line of his life, being like tentative excursions away from the main route. I have left them alone.

The book of the American girl does not contain much that promises to be understandable. A Portion is open to the understanding mind in a pointless kind of way: it may be understood, but its understanding does not add or subtract anything from the grasping faculty. Chance encounters, notes from a variety of sources which might as well, with a small number of exceptions, remain incoherent – the issue of an aimless existence.

I do not, in the end, understand his attraction for her. The truth is, I do not want to understand. I am afraid to understand. Afraid, ultimately, for myself.  
(p. 71)

It may be argued, therefore, that the entries which appear in Modin's, Aimee's and his own words are Solo's synthesized selected editorial versions. To a very large extent, we are forced to view the journeys of life of the three characters through Solo's focalization. The first entry in Modin's notebook initiates its version of the tale by highlighting and linking the narrative interplay of eroticism and alienation. Bonnie J. Barthold's *Black Time* (1981) confirms how Solo, the surrogate author, interweaves the actual diary entries with the thematic concerns of the novel. At a more intricate level "Solo Nkonam", to borrow from Peter Thomas's review article entitled "Review of *Why Are We So Blest?*" (1973:81), "... acts as Chorus to Modin's tragedy". Barthold reveals that "Solo narrates the story, largely on the basis of the notebooks kept by Aimee and Modin, which have come into his hands. A passage from the first entry in Modin's notebook fuses the narrative interplay of sexuality and isolation" (Barthold, 1981:170).

The bombastic revolutionary slogans, which the naive masses believe in, are nothing but empty words fabricated to fool the populace. Significantly, Solo tells us: "I reached the place of my dream. I found pain, not fulfilment. The arrangements made for fighting privilege were themselves structures of privilege" (p. 114). To Solo's utter dismay, the freedom fighters are untrained and ill-equipped and are slaughtered in great numbers by the powerfully-armed Portuguese colonizers, while in Laccryville, which Robert Fraser refers to as "a rather thin disguise for Algiers" (1978:40), the UPC Revolutionary Office's head, Jorge Manuel, lives in opulence. Solo withdraws from the war zone to Laccryville, the war-ravaged capital of a recently independent Arab state of Afrasia (Algeria), where he discovers how the revolutionary establishment in exile has subverted the struggle for independence and converted it into a luxurious lifestyle for themselves. The evidence of the cycle of recurring historical follies which plague Africa is conveyed by "a large display panel" which underpins the leadership's betrayal of fighting cadres of the UPC revolutionary freedom movement, whose office is ironically situated on "1, RUE FRANTZ FANON" (p. 48):

The first thing you see as you enter the Bureau from the street is a large display panel. Under the bold, neat heading

#### LE PEUPLE CONGHERIENE EN LUTTE

are arranged twenty-one large, glossy pictures of the forces of the UPC in action. The pictures are intended to show the movement as a serious, disciplined and well-

organized force. The first shots are historical. In them everything seems exaggeratedly rudimentary. The soldiers of the rebellion appear to be a confused crowd, wearing assorted clothes. There is then a rapid progression through stages in which only a few are in uniform, then most, until in the last pictures everyone is in uniform. Not only that. Now there are different types of uniform for different ranks, the colors getting lighter with increasing rank ... Dominating all the pictures is a huge portrait of the leader of the UPC, looking sternly down upon his followers through his spectacles. Under this picture is the caption:

IGNACE SENDOULWA  
PREMIER MILITANT

The man is shown wearing an immaculate white suit. (p. 49)

Solo is shattered by the duplicitous standard revealed by the UPC office in the city of Laccryville. He tells us that the betrayal of the soldiers in the field is re-enacted by the organization of the revolutionary liberation office in Laccryville. The narrator maintains that the display panel of pictures suggests that UPC regards the hierarchisation and window-dressing white-washing of its system as a mark of sophistication and discipline. Lazarus explicates Solo's views as follows:

He had hoped to find a resolutely Afrocentric, anti-imperialist and nonhierarchical enterprise. Instead, the display seemed to speak of a force that regarded its increasing hierarchisation as a source of sophistication and positive achievement, and that had given so little thought to its own history and ostensibly revolutionary project that could without self-consciousness or embarrassment design uniforms that coded lightness with status and whiteness with supremacy.

(Lazarus, 1990:126).

Solo has seen that the revolution has become profoundly unrevolutionary: the militant anti-hegemonic structures built to fight Portuguese colonial hegemony have become supremacist systems designed to entrench elitism and private selfish interests. The old colonial class structures in which the indigenous Africans wallowed in the communal dirt while the European colonizers luxuriated in a sumptuous lifestyle are retained for the perpetual enjoyment of the revolutionary leaders. Thus we are told that the UPC offices in Laccryville, "the Bureau of the People's Union of Congheria", occupy a two-storey building made of lower and upper floors. The lower floor is occupied by "the dark African", Esteban Ngulo, who has never been to a university. This office, according to Solo, "gives at least a vague impression of austere dedication"—an "impression the upper office destroys immediately" (p.50):

The floor there is covered completely with a thick blue carpet. There is no desk

– only a set of deep armchairs around a polished circular table. On the wall across from the entrance is a painting. It is a Parisian scene, a bridge in the twilight. The left wall has a bar, beneath which is a refrigerator ... In the Bureau there are usually two people: Jorge Manuel and Esteban Ngulo. Jorge Manuel is half Portuguese. Like me, he has had a university education, in Lisbon. Esteban Ngulo has never been to a university. (p.50)

Like the middle class elite of lawyers, whom Armah describes as Black Englishmen, who look down upon the non-university educated in *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah is highlighting the traditional arrogance and snobbery of the educated elite in Africa – proud men full of self-grandeur and who consider themselves as the only people qualified and destined rule Africa. Invariably, they tend to impose their own selfish interests and class-oriented systems upon the masses; their political track records are mere echoes of the departing colonial masters. The entrenched class system in the operation of the UPC offices in Laccryville is revealed by the fact that Jorge Manuel, the mulatto graduate, who occupies the luxuriously furnished upper quarters, has an ostentatious elevated status of “Foreign Minister of the Congherian Government in Exile”. We are told that although Congheria has not yet achieved independence, Jorge Manuel “has already the gift of carrying himself with the self-conscious dignity of an African leader”. And Solo adds: “I find it amazing, this immense awareness of one’s own importance ...” (p. 51). The exploitation of the gullible African masses by their rulers is articulated poignantly by Solo as follows:

There has always been, to me, something sad in the relationship of Jorge Manuel and Esteban Ngulo, the mulatto and the dark, silent African ... But how long would it have been possible not to see that the lighter brother drank spirits upstairs with suave travellers, while down below the black one licked the tasteless backs of stamps? So the awareness would not bury itself, that here, too, was a division that would exist even when the last of the Portuguese had left Congheria, the ambiguous freedom of Esteban Ngulo to serve while Jorge Manuel consumed the credit and the sweetness. Man and his shadow, I began to call them in my mind” (p. 52).

Like the bombastic praise names Nkrumah gives himself and King Koranche’s slave factor’s antics portrayed in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the empty bold slogans of “equality and justice”, Solo reveals, “dissolved ... into an endless procession of masters and servants” or more appropriately “masters and slaves” (p.52). Most Africans used to entertain the dream that the leaders of

revolutionary liberation movements in Africa would turn out to be better politicians than the first guard of African leaders who succumbed to corruption and tyranny. This perception stemmed from the view that many years of wars against rapacious and death-dealing colonizers would have taught them the essence of justice and equality. But this dream almost invariably turns to be nightmare when these former liberation leaders become heads of state. *Why Are We So Blest?* maintains that the corruption of the African states which attained freedom through liberation wars could be discerned from the manipulative and exploitative ways in which these leaders maltreated the revolutionary cadres who bore the brunt of fighting during the liberation wars. One crucial point needs to be made: while the poorly armed and untrained soldiers get killed and crippled on the battle-fronts fighting for Africa's emancipation, their leaders live in safety, enjoying the fruits of the labour of the underdogs. In order to substantiate his thesis of the widespread betrayal by the political leadership in Africa, Armah links the UPC's exploitation of its militant soldiers and cadres with that of Algeria, which had lately won its independence from France after eight years of bloody liberation wars. That Algeria was the classic example of nationhood born out of liberation wars is demonstrated by the fact that Frantz Fanon used the Algerian case in structuring his classic work on Third World politics, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), a truism Armah endorses by giving Frantz Fanon's name to the street on which the UPC Bureau is located.

Armah engages in a fictional enterprise which dispels the illusion of the euphoria of militant revolutionary politics as the only viable instrument of creating an equitable society for the ruled. The silent majority believes that political revolution is the essence of life but Armah/Solo disagrees, saying that the revolution is nothing but "cracked promises and maimed bodies of lost believers" (p.13). Both Yambo Ouologuem in *Bound to Violence* and Armah in *Why Are We So Blest?* believe that politics breeds corruption and injustice. In my essay entitled "Africa's Golden Age Deflated: A Reading of Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*" (1995) I make a comment which relevantly echoes Armah's. I argue that "The naïve niggertrash's hope that 'the golden age when all the swine [tyrants] will die is just around the corner' is quickly dispelled by the cynical assertion that freedom is 'a false window offering a vista of happiness'" (p.174) (Kwame Ayivor, 1995:60). *Bound to Violence* perceives man's endless search for freedom as an absurd quest because "politics does not lend itself to honest expression" (p.176). Armah, like Ouologuem, maintains that politics subsists on corruption and mystification.



The expected restoration of equalities which the Algerian revolutionary liberation wars intend to achieve turns into disillusionment. The only signs that Algeria has fought bloody wars of liberation against the French colonizers before attaining its freedom are the widespread ruins and the human wreckage which dominate the landscape of the country and are visible on all the streets. The injustices of the past are now entrenched in the political life of the new nation. Like Solo of Congheria, the Algerian revolutionary casualty – depicted as the cripple with one leg – spends his convalescent years in hospitable reading about the French Revolution in his attempt to find answers to the harrowing question: “But ... who gains? Afterwards, who gains?” (p. 26). The Algerian liberation war cripple exposes the resulting injustice as follows: “Those who offer themselves up to be killed, to be maimed and driven insane, those who go beyond what is even possible for other human beings in their pursuit of the revolution, they are its essence” (p. 26). The debate on “who gained” is designed to demystify the pawns and the manipulators/parasites of revolutionary liberation wars in Africa. The militant soldiers who fight the bulk of these wars and are maimed and killed in their millions all over Africa are symbolized in *Why Are We So Blest?* by the French word “l’essence”, [fuel or petrol] which connotes “that which is essential”. Solo is in agreement with the one-legged Algerian liberation war-veteran and finally unravels the deeper insights of the role of the militant soldiers and the suave revolutionary leaders by representing the revolution as a massive truck and the dispensable militants as the fuel which is burnt so as to push the heavy truck uphill to its required destination:

“The militants are the essence. But you know, that also means they are the fuel for the revolution. And the nature of fuel ... you know, something pure, light, even spiritual, which consumes itself to push forward something heavier, far more gross than itself ... The truck represents society. Any society. Heavy. With the corrupt ones, the opportunists, the drugged, the old, the young, everybody, in it. And then there are the militants, pushing the whole massive thing from the lower to the higher level. But they themselves are destroyed in the process” (pp. 26-27).

The thousands or the hundreds of thousands militants who are destroyed and crippled occupy the two extremes in the scenario: they are both the losers and the “essence” of the revolution. This destructiveness of the revolutionary activism foreshadows Modin’s horrendous murder at the close of the novel. William A. Walker, Jr endorses this interpretation when he asserts in his PhD thesis, *Major Ghanaian Fiction in English*, that “Modin is to be destroyed in his attempt at activism just as the militants are destroyed in the process of improving their society” (Walker,

!975:161). This journey motif in which the society is represented as a bus journey is initiated in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the great migration through the vastness of primeval Africa re-evokes the motif of a journey as epitomized by “the [famous] springwater flowing to the desert”, but the vehicle disappears from the schema. The intellectual leaders of Africa’s freedom fighters send the ill-equipped and untrained naive militant fighting cadres to the war zones where they are mowed down by superior colonialist hardware while they themselves enjoy a life of luxury in plush offices in the cities of the world. Thus revolutionary soldiers are exploited in the struggle to achieve political freedom. As a reward for their patriotic service, their leaders ensure that they are submitted to perpetual subjugation and relegation to second-rate citizens. The injustices of the liberation movements, *Why Are We So Blest?* insists, are virtually transferred and enshrined in the new post-independent state structures. This perception is eloquently conveyed by Jorge Manuel’s relegation of Esteban Ngulo to the status of a clerical underling. The phrase, “the ambiguous freedom of Esteban Ngulo to serve while Jorge Manuel consumed the credit and the sweetness” (p. 52), exposes an injustice which, we are told, will continue even after Congheria attains its independence from Portugal. Like Esteban Ngulo, the one-legged Algerian ex-militant cripple discovers that he and his comrades who are maimed and killed during the Algerian revolution are nothing but the fuel meant to be consumed in achieving freedom. What is disconcerting is the fact that while militant cadres are killed on the battle front, it is not they, but the intellectual revolutionary leaders who enjoy the fruits of victory – the attainment of independence. Solo asserts that the intellectual leaders who do not experience any fighting and confine themselves to their luxurious urban offices where they “drank spirits with suave travellers” (p. 52) devote their attention to fraternizing with foreigners who are only passing through the country. Worse than these, Solo suggests, the leaders of the UPC betray the aspirations of the revolution by rejecting a committed aspirant revolutionary like Modin, who terminated his graduate study at Harvard to join the maquis. What this extract reveals is that the general endemic exploitation of the masses, which plagues independent states of Africa, is also common among the revolutionary liberation leaders. The citation above, therefore, not only unveils the endless dispossession and brutalization of the African populace by their rulers but it also shows that the leaders of African liberation movements are not different from the rest of Africa’s degenerate political leaders.

The destitution and reduction of the populace of the Algerian capital of Algiers (Laccryville) into cripples and beggars who swarm over the ruined city, begging from any stranger they see, are the most eloquent testimony of the betrayal of revolutionary liberation politics in Africa. The liberation wars have reduced Algeria into a rubble inhabited by orphaned children and the handicapped who roam the streets begging for food while their leaders live in luxury. Thomas elucidates this view in his essay when he asserts that "Equally disturbing is Solo's description of the fatherless children and countless beggars left behind by the revolution in Laccryville [Algiers]" (Thomas, 1973:82):

There are the children ... When asked about their families they talk of their mothers. About their fathers they all give the same answer:

*"Mon pere? Il est mort."*

There are the real beggars, the grown-up ones ... It is impossible to tell who among these were beggars before the revolution, and who were beggared by the haemorrhage itself. All I am aware of when I walk past them is a general feeling of guilt ... (pp.15-17)

Armah's view of the leadership of the liberation movements in Africa is akin to Breyten Breytenbach's comment about the South African liberation movements. In his novel, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1986), Breytenbach alludes to "my dear, ineffective, fat institutionalized friends in the liberation movement[s] ... those professional diplomats, those living off the fat of the suffering of our people back home and who've done so for years and will do so until they die, not really worried about ever going back, the suave politicians" (Breytenbach, 1986:97). By some weird coincidence both Armah and Breytenbach use the same word, "suave", in their castigation of the corrupt African revolutionary liberation leadership. The corruption which has crippled nationalist governments of Africa, Armah maintains, decimates the African revolutionary liberation movements as well. Solo adopts an ambivalent attitude to Esteban Ngulo, whom he describes as Manuel's "shadow": a man he admires for his industriousness yet condemns for his complacency and gullibility. Ngulo diligently performs menial tasks with a religious zeal and closes his eyes to Manuel's treatment of him as a near-slave. The duplicitous revolutionary slogans created by Manuel to mystify the UPC leadership's abuse of the militant cadres appear to fool Ngulo completely. Lazarus unveils Ngulo's subservient status as follows: "Possessed of a stunning ability to devote himself to the most menial of tasks singlemindedly and with unquestioning obedience, Ngulo is the perfect petty bureaucrat – his current position as cadre of

an ostensibly revolutionary movement notwithstanding" (1990:128).

The betrayal of the UPC liberation movement of the Portuguese African colony of Congheria and that of Algeria is linked ingeniously to Kwame Nkrumah's deception of Ghanaian masses. The revelation of the Ghanaian connection is conveyed to us by Modin's excursion into the Christianborg (Slave) Castle, in which Nkrumah has installed himself after the kicking out the British Governor General after his declaration of Ghana as a republic. In *Two Thousand Seasons* Kamuzu installs himself in the castle after helping the initiates led by Isanusi to capture and kill the European governor who lived in the castle. Nkrumah's occupation and self-installation closely paralleled Kamuzu's. It could be argued that Kamuzu is a double walking caricature of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Kamuzu Banda of Malawi. In *Why Are We So Blest* Nkrumah's addiction to opulence is revealed by the extravagant alterations and renovations carried out on the castle before the President moved into it, which are described as follows:

First he [the guide] took us to the Presidential Wing. It was new. I could smell the concrete. The happy guide told us that the wing had been renovated at a cost of two and half million pounds to make it fit for the President to move in. The British governor used to live there before this colony got a new name.

The guide told us it was extremely important for the President to live exactly where the British governor had lived .... Every room in the Presidential Wing had air conditioning, like the American embassy .... We passed by a swimming pool. I did not know there was another swimming pool in town, apart from ours at school and the one at the American Ambassador's residence. This one was shaped like a map of Africa. It was beautiful.

The side of the castle opposite the Presidential Wing was horrible. "Here, above," the guide said, "were the quarters of the armed guard ... It was only space for soldiers and sailors to sleep.... But this room is especially important. Here –" he pointed to a slit in one wall, like the rifle holes outside, but slanted to give an extremely narrow, vertical field of vision, "here is where the factor always stood ...."

"The factor – he was a very important person, the one whose job it was to get the slaves from inland, and keep them in a place near here till there were enough. When the Europeans were ready to buy, the slaves were brought into the castle. This room is where the factor, the slave dealer, stayed while bargaining with the Europeans about the price of the slaves. You have seen the thickness of the walls. You have seen how narrow the sighthole is. The factor could see the slaves and bargain with the Europeans for the price he wanted for them, but the slaves could not see him. That protected the factor in case some slaves escaped, or there was a rebellion here". (pp. 76-78)

*unused now*. The curious can go and look at them, as if slavery belonged to the a past history. The destruction has reached higher, that is all. The factor's pay is now given in advanced, and sold men are not mentioned, not seen in any mind. Their price is given the factor for some mythical quality of his dead spirit. His murdered intelligence is praised. The easier for the givers of these scholarships, this factors' pay, to *structure* the recipients' lives into modern factorship. (p.161)

In the diary which embodies his senior thesis at Harvard, Modin contends that the thick walls and the slit used by the factor in the slave castle to conceal the nefarious activities of selling his own people into slavery are not needed in modern slave factorship because the sale of human gold is mystified by Western education and enlightenment. Modin captures this covert nature of the role of the modern slave factor in these words: "BEFORE THE WHITE MEN CAME. Ten pages of blood and savagery. THE WHITE MAN COMES. ENLIGHTENMENT, CIVILIZATION, PROGRESS, DEVELOPMENT ..." (pp. 160-161). This excerpt reveals how the so-called white man's "civilized mission's" transforms "ten pages of blood and savagery" into a sophisticated servile culture which demystifies the monstrous destructiveness of the modern slave factorship. Instead of the old colonial method of enslaving those captured during slave raids, the modern slave factors sell off to the West entire nations of unprivileged masses. Modin's diary's most unequivocal de-mystification of the relationship between slave factorship and the Western educational system in modern Africa is conveyed as follows:

In the imperial [and also in the neo-colonial] situation the educational process is turned into an elitist ritual for selecting slave traders. The revolutionary ideal is an actual, working egalitarian society. What existed before European invasion: a whole society organized for self-defense. War against the invader should be the educational process for creating new anti-European, anti-imperial, anti-elitist values. (p. 222)

On attainment of independence, the ruling elite moves into the European sectors and builds more palaces for themselves while the masses continue to live in dirt and to be exploited and relegated into second-rate citizens. The aftermath of the African intellectual betrayal of the African populace is that independent states of Africa have become virtually neo-colonies. Both Solo and Modin have come to one basic conclusion: that the entire continent of Africa is made of neo-colonies which are controlled by the West. Thus, referring to the recently independent Algeria, Solo says "Things take long in a colony only freshly disguised as a nation ..." (p. 138). And similarly, Modin

tells Aimee “I just think of our small states as colonial things. I am an African” (p. 176). Here, Modin implies that he does not consider Ghana to be an independent nation but regards it as a neo-colony and, therefore, prefers calling himself “an African” instead of referring to himself as a Ghanaian. The theme of neo-colonialism finds its most elaborate treatment in *Fragments* when Armah exploits powerfully a heavily symbolic television screenplay entitled *The Brand*. George B. N. Ayittey’s *Africa Betrayed* (1992) unequivocally endorses Armah’s indictment of the African intelligentsia for their betrayal of Africa. Ayittey writes:

In the 1960s the cause for which African intellectuals compromised their principles was independence from colonial rule. This overriding goal kept many African intellectuals from discussing participatory forms of government and from challenging dictatorships. Believing that the end justified the means, many intellectuals expected the masses to make sacrifices to fight colonialism. These sacrifices included political rights. Few intellectuals were willing to challenge the denial of these rights and risk being portrayed as colonial agents ... So many professors sold out by singing the praises of tyrannical regimes in exchange for an appointment or a Mercedes-Benz! And so many journalists flouted the imperatives of their profession – objectivity and balance – to please autocratic regimes. Even the barbarous military regimes of Idi Amin of Uganda and Samuel Doe of Liberia could find professors to serve at their beck and call. Professional standards, ethics, integrity, and probity were sold off by Africa’s “educated” to win favors. (Ayittey, 1992:294-295)

Ayittey’s work is the most corrosive repudiation of political leadership in contemporary Africa. But unlike Armah, who partly blames Africa’s tyranny, poverty and disintegration on the West (at least in this novel), Ayittey “writes devastatingly on the horrors of black neo-colonialism, arguing that it is naive for commentators to blame Africa’s misery on external factors: African leaders have ... betrayed the just aspirations of their countrymen ...” (Dust-jacket cover). The Ghanaian author contends that what we have in modern Africa is not European neo-colonialism but black neo-colonialism – a new type of colonialism in which indigenous African leaders are the colonizers who treat their countries as their own private properties – black neo-colonies which are more viciously raped than the European colonies they replaced. This theme is elaborately dealt by Armah in *The Beautiful Ones* as we shall see – a theme in which Armah’s exploits scatology and multifarious symbols and dystopian metaphors to project a vision which mounts the most maligned portrait of Africa ever painted by an African writer. Where Ayittey and Armah part company is that while Ayittey repudiates modern African leaders and romanticizes the ancient

kings, Armah adopts a stance which links the past follies to that of the fabulous ancient kings. Now to the thematic concern regarding the evolve.

The theme of assimilation and the been-to, which is one of the preoccupations of Armah in *Why Are We So Blest?*, has been a major concern in African writings for many decades. That this theme is treated in African historical works as well as the creative ones, demonstrates its importance in African development. In his work, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (1889), Carl C. Reindorf of the Gold Coast writes: "This want of principle in us Africans ... that those who have got education in Europe look down on our own brethren who were educated in the country, is the sole cause of the unimproved state of the country" (pp. 281-282). Reindorf's comment introduces another element in the theme of Western education: namely, those who make the voyage from the communal dirt to the land of the Olympians and are educated there consider themselves superior to those who get their university education in Africa. This view intensifies the supreme status the been-to tends to enjoy in Africa and hence Armah's vicious onslaught against the Euro-American educated Africans's betrayal of the masses. Commenting on Reindorf's work, Robert W. July in his *The Origins of Modern African Thought* (1968) reveals how Reindorf isolates the Gold Coast women's addiction to European ethos for further indictment:

The [educated] women of the Gold Coast tried to live like English women, refraining from working and mistaking the mere use of European dress for the wearing of true civilization. Educated Africans patronized their uneducated compatriots, divorcing themselves from their own people and associating only with the white man. (July, 1968:261)

What is interesting here is the fact that the educated African elite's relegation of the illiterate masses to a servile position has been going on for centuries. Armah's treatment of the subject is more elaborate and more eclectic than previous works on the theme. The adverse effects of westernization on the educated African is also elucidated by Bishop James Johnson of Nigeria. Johnson's view appears in *The Lagos Weekly Record* (May 2 1896). In his explication of Johnson's observation on the corrosive effects of assimilation on the African elites, July records that:

... the African in his struggle for self-improvement had reached out for the help of



European civilization, but in the process he had sustained serious injury and perhaps in the long run had lost more than he had gained. He gained a measure of what was called civilization, but with this achievement he found that the man – the genuine man – had disappeared. 'The African is not there,' he said, 'and the European whom we think we imitate is not there.' What is left? 'Nothing'.

(July, 1968: 289)

The African propensity to ape alien culture and ideologies, which is symbolically exploited in *Why Are We So Blest?* where the theme appears to reach its pinnacle, is objectivised in *Two Thousand Seasons* in its embryonic form and is rehearsed more elaborately in *The Healers*. It is clear from Johnson's view that the corrosiveness of Africa's assimilation of European civilization and culture is not a new theme in African writing. Armah's eclectic treatment of the topic links it with the role of African chiefs as slave factors in the Arab and the European slave trade. Thus the educated Africans, particularly those have been educated abroad (the been-tos), are projected as modern slave factors who exploit their illiterate compatriots for their own eternal enjoyment and that of their European mentors. The ineptitude of the African intellectuals is confirmed by Simon Simonse's "African Literature Between Nostalgia and Utopia" (1982) as follows: "*Why Are We So Blest?* argues the absolute impotence of the African revolutionary intelligentsia" (Simonse, 1982:475).

To hammer home his thesis of the ineptitude and sterility of African intellectuals, Armah further parodies the Greek myth of Prometheus, which is initiated in *Fragments* in an altered garb and first appears in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, as Plato's Cave. The manipulation of the myth Prometheus as a creative device resurfaces in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah structures the novel around the mythological matrix of Anoa. Similarly in *The Healers* a mythic ritual fancy is achieved by Armah's exploitation of the Akan river deity, Densu and the Asante myth of origins centred around Okomfo Anokye. According to the classical myth, Prometheus was one of the ancient Titans (deities) who lived on Mount Olympus, the mythical paradise. Prometheus saw the suffering of men and decided to convey to them the gift of fire, but the King of the Titans, Zeus, forbade him to do that. Though forbidden, Prometheus stole fire from Olympus and took it down to men who lived in the muddy plains of Tartarus. For this disobedience, Zeus chained "the boon-bringer to the highest summit of the [Mount] Caucasus, drove a pillar through his middle in the way of a stake, and sent an eagle" to feed continually on

his entrails (Joseph Campbell, 1959:280). This Promethean role or cross-over is Modin's projected course of action. Armah dramatizes the myth of Prometheus in a conversation between a conservative American student, called Mike, and Modin – a debate centred on an article on Thanksgiving entitled “Why Are We So Blest?”, which becomes the title of Armah's novel. In her “The Human and the Divine” (1980), Rosemary Colmer explicates the significance of the novel's title when she asserts that “... in *Why Are We So Blest?* the central image from which the novel draws its title is of a dividing line between human and divine. Those who cross it are the ‘Blest’ of the title; those who fail to do so are Fanon's *Damnes de la terre*. Those elevated to the statue of the Blest are acclaimed as heroes, but they are alienated from the wretched ...” (Colmer, 1980:78). Thus Mike likens the United States to the Olympus of classical Greek myth and positions the foreign students in American universities as Promethean “crossovers”. According to the article, America is “the paradisaal top storey of the three-tier universe, a model derived from the Greeks. The storey in this arrangement represents ‘the communal dirt’, while in the space in between blunder those who, by dint of special ability or effort, are granted the privilege accorded to ‘cross-overs’, those whose honorary membership of the celestial club provides evidence of a special grace ...” (Robert Fraser, 1980:61). For Mike “The myth of Paradise finds its full meaning here, in the New World. Paradise is a state of grace, and grace is space – the distance that separates the holy from the merely human, the sacred from the profane ...” (p. 98). The thesis Mike is straining to hammer home is the argument that America symbolizes not only wealth and paradise but also spiritual purity, which the Third World lacks. Modin rejects this hierarchical elitist construct, countering it with “reverse crossover”. Mike and Modin argue accordingly:

‘Modin, you're nobody's plaything. That's vulgar. The question is deeper than that. You're a scholarship student. There's justice in that. You belong here. The arrangement that brings you here has to be a good arrangement. In the Greek tradition you'd be a cross-over. One of those who rise from the plains to live on Olympus. A hero. Part man, part god. Therefore more interesting than either.’

‘Even staying in your mythology, you shut out the Promethean factor.’

‘I guess that's a reverse crossover. No. I didn't want to shut it out. But it's unique. Besides, who has the idiotic ambition to go through the crossing twice: a heroic, then a Promethean crossing? That's insane.’

‘Only according to your mythology. There are other myths, you know.’

(pp. 101-102)

Modin, like Baako in *Fragments*, decides to use his “fire” (Western acquired skills and creative

his Western education at Harvard, which prepares him for the role of the modern slave factor exploiting the masses for his selfish interests. Instead of the traditional role of the been-to who walks into a great job with perks, Modin leaves for Afrasia [Algeria] where he intends to enlist in the maquis of the UPC liberation movement of Congheria as a fighting cadre. This action amounts to turning his back on the ruling elites of Africa and also on the Olympians/American donors who pay for his scholarship. Like Baako in *Fragments* and the Man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Modin falls short of attaining this goal – an abysmal failure which is evoked by his own rejection by the liberation movement of Congheria. Why has the UPC Bureau in Laccryville rejected Modin's request to join the maquis as a revolutionary cadre?

What is ironical is the fact that Jorge Manuel, who has a secret white mistress, rejects Modin's application to join the maquis simply because Modin has a white girlfriend. Manuel, the hypocrite, explains to Solo, who tries to persuade Manuel and Esteban Ngulo to recruit Modin, the reasons for the rejection. Jorge Manuel, a mullato, asserts with a forked tongue as follows: "Look, an African in love with a European is a pure slave. Not a man accidentally enslaved. A pure slave with the heart of a slave, with the spirit of a slave. We don't need anyone like that here" (p.255). Modin's rebuff reveals his double-alienation from the worlds of the Olympians and the oppressed and dispossessed humanity who live in Tartarus and for whom he feels great compassion. Modin's destiny rehearses that of Prometheus. Joyce Johnson elucidates this view in her "The Promethean 'Factor' in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*" (1982) when she asserts that "... Prometheus has also been seen as the prototype of the alienated intellectual whose concern for humanity leads him to offend the ruling power structure. His role as a go-between renders him suspect both by the 'gods', with whom he has a natural empathy, and by oppressed humanity, for whom he feels great sympathy" (Johnson, 1982:497). Playing the role of Chorus to Modin's existential agony, Solo acts out the dissolution and the homelessness of his existence. Life has become either stunted or decayed and fragmented. Rather, the narrator is overwhelmed with a feeling of not belonging, a devastating cosmic alienation. Solo records in his diary that "...there is no portion of the stream, no part of all this flowing life, into which I can fling myself and say: "Here I belong. This is my home. Here I shall do the work of my life." (p.11) The theme of cosmic placelessness is continued in *Fragments* in which Baako is the representative figure. Closely related to Armah's ingenious manipulation of the Promethean factor is his grotesque

caricature of Aimee, Modin's German-American girlfriend, who is represented as "the eagle which daily devours Prometheus's entrails". This is epitomized by her draining of Modin's "spiritual and physical resources" through her continuous copulation with him. To magnify Aimee's exploitation of Modin, Armah portrays her not only as a frigid white woman who needs Modin's exotic African sexual potency to nourish her own stunted sexuality, but also as an archetypal European feminine predator who perpetually feeds on Modin's life-generating forces in order to sustain her own lifeless soul and vacuous physical being. Aimee's kissing of Modin's genitals and her drinking of the blood from his bleeding penis, which has been severed into two by the demonic French soldiers in the torrid vastness of the Sahara at the close of the novel (p. 288), and Solo's contemptuous assessment of Manuel's white mistress and Aimee, appear to confirm this perception. Solo's impression of the European woman as a carnal predator feeding on her Black boyfriend is conveyed as follows: "I have never seen humans look so predatory ... Now I don't think of slaves and mistresses. I see in each such happy black carrion – fastened onto by a beast of prey" (p. 269).

Modin's castration recalls the newspaper picture "of the Boston girl who cut off her man friends testicles with a nail clipper, put them in her handbag, then tried to disappear southward, into the South American hinterland" (p. 276). It re-enacts Aimee's oral stimulation of Modin's penis when she is forced to help sexually stimulate him for castration. Commenting on the Boston girl's demonic behaviour, Edward Lobb asserts in his essay entitled "Personal and Political Fate in Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?*" (1986) that "The nail clippers become, in Modin's mind, part of the woman's genitalia, and the classic male fear of the *vagina dentata* is thus associated, through Aimee, with the historical emasculation of the black man; Modin's thoughts also, of course, prefigure his own mutilation" (Lobb, 1986:14). Lobb further illuminates Armah's representation of Aimee's attachment to Modin as follows:

Aimee's interest in Modin is, like her radicalism, part of her search for new sensations. Having an affair with an African is a novelty, and Modin remains essentially anonymous, *an African*, to her. Like the other Europeans and Americans Modin has encountered, she is incapable of seeing his individuality, his personality. She therefore quite innocently aggravates his alienation and constantly misreads his character ... Worse still, she is intrigued by Modin because of old taboos against interracial sex. In bed with him, Aimee imagines herself a memsahib whose husband, a repressive colonial administrator, comes home to find her making love with the houseboy. (Lobb, 1986:8)

What Aimee has achieved here is Modin's status reversal. She has successfully reduced the educated Modin in her homicidal fantasy into an uneducated sexually potent houseboy who speaks pidgin English and, as Lobb aptly concludes, "a figure more exotic, more primitive, and therefore more thrilling" (Lobb, 1986:9). Commenting on Aimee's reduction of Modin into a houseboy in order to indulge in her sexual fantasies, Charles Larson explains in his "Review of *Why Are We So Blest?*" that Aimee's "sexual fantasies, rooted in her stereotyped dreams of deepest, darkest Africa, underlie the master-slave relationship she has established over Modin" (Larson, 1972:74). Armah appears to be arguing that Africans who do establish friendships with Euro-American women are spiritually compromised. This view is sustained at various levels. For instance, the slave factor, Ndugu Pakansa, who has a white girlfriend and refuses to participate in the Kansan liberation war for freedom, nonetheless becomes the head of state when Kansa attains independence. Similarly Jorge Manuel, the head of the Laccyville UPC office of Congheria, also has a European mistress and has put in place a class structured government in exile, treating Esteban Ngulo as a slave. Solo, the surrogate author of the novel, has also had amorous relationship with a Portuguese girl, Sylvia, and has lost his "fire" and is trapped in sterility. America replays this scenario. Thus Dr Earl Lynch who is married to a white American woman is trapped in a web of whiteness. "All these men (Modin, Solo, Pakansa, Manuel and Dr Lynch)," to borrow from Lobb, "act out what Armah apparently sees as the central drama of African relationships with the white world on the personal, political and cultural levels: the divorce of the black man from his own people and culture and his half-absorption into an alien culture which is essentially corrupt and death-dealing" (Lobb, 1986:9).

The theme of the "ambiguity of love, of its closeness to hate" (p.28) is affirmed by the love-hate relationship between Modin and Aimee. Dr Lynch's love-hate feeling towards White colleagues at Harvard University, whose wives he copulates with under the naive notion that he is engaged in a serious militant revolutionary activity which involves avenging for the enslavement of his ancestors by White America, underpins Armah's preoccupation with this theme. Similarly Solo's relationship with a Portuguese girl, Sylvia, whom he loves and attempts to marry, confirms this love-hate proclivity of the African male towards Europeans, particularly European women. Solo's

hatred towards European women is rooted in his rejection by Sylvia during his student years in Lisbon. The intensity of his love-hate feeling is demystified by his own views on the subject:

How indeed, except through confusion, could that African soul love an American? What, save its own dissolution, would move an African soul to a European? So much of myself I saw him, the African destroyed. My love for Sylvia; it no longer looked the same. I too have been confused .... (p. 139)

The psycho-sexual allegory Armah exploits with consummate virtuosity is syncretized by Solo who has been burned previously by the love-affair with Sylvia, the Portuguese girl, and by his failure as a revolutionary – existential paths Modin threads too. Solo's creative and intellectual sterility takes the form of mystified emotions of the *abiku*. The *abiku* motif, treated in an embryonic form through the Abena initiation's dance in *Two Thousand Seasons*, resurfaces in modified variations throughout the corpus. It appears in weird form in *Why Are We So Blest?*. This time, the victim is a male character: Solo. We are told that "For days [Solo's] body shook with the realization. Refusing to renew itself, rejecting sustenance, it threw out the life already stored in it. All my apertures ran with fluid, living and dead, escaping a body unwilling to hold them: blood, urine, vomit, tears, diarrhea, pus" (p.114). These emotions, or cycles of *abiku* echo those of Abena in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Araba Jesiwa in *The Healers*, Araba in *Fragments*, appearing as a heretical birth in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Like a pregnant woman going through emotions of abortion we are told that all Solo's "apertures ran [wild] with fluid, living and dead, escaping a body unwilling to hold" its juices of life. This mystified rehearsal of the theme of *abiku* substantiates the five novels' retreading of thematic and stylistic patterns. The repetitive treatment of similar themes and narrative patterning by the novels confirms the organic thematic wholeness of the five texts.

The compulsive attraction the African intellectual experiences towards white women and the hatred he has towards himself for this weakness is sustained by Modin's failure to leave Aimee alone in spite of the fact that Naita, the sharp-witted African American, has warned him of the danger of Blackman versus white-woman relationships when Modin tries to defend his relationship with Mrs Jefferson. Armah suggests that no meaningful love can develop between a Blackman and White woman, for such a relationship subsists only on carnal pleasure. Naita dismisses Modin's claim that Mrs Jefferson loves him as follows: "Look, her husband can't screw her so she comes to you to get

some, that's cool. But don't start thinking some white bitch gon be your good friend. That's just stupid" (p.134). Like in *Two Thousand Seasons*, in *Why Are We So Blest?*, Armah reveals that the love-hate relationship between the Blackman and European woman presents no grey areas only absolutes. Commenting on this black versus white Manicheanism exploited by Armah, Colmer asserts that "Every thought, every utterance, every relationship in the novel is presented only as evidence for the operation of the polar opposites, Blest and Damned, on those who are moving between them" (Colmer, 1980:84). It impossible to suggest that every Blackman-European-woman relationship is doomed to failure. In his "*Why Are We So Blest?*" (1980) James Booth argues that "The question arises, however, as to whether Armah's version of interracial relations is ultimately more convincing than Conton's. It may avoid the naivetes of the liberal myth, but it is not itself just as open to the charge of being blinkered and one-sided" (Booth, 1980:54)? I totally endorse Booth's rhetorical question and the general view of a warped vision which distorts the reality of black-white relationship in the world.

Naita's warnings, however, are fulfilled when Prof Jefferson later sets a trap for Modin, and stabs him many times when he catches Modin making love to Mrs Jefferson, almost killing him. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this horrific incident is that Armah perceives the United States as a destructive world. In her essay, Colmer not only confirms this viewpoint, but she also reveals a curious paradox which lurks on the margin of the notion of America being a destructive wasteland. Colmer argues that "In *Why Are WE So Blest?* the United States, now not simply a ghostly world but the Land of the Blest, is a destructive world. Yet only by passing from the world of the wretched to the world of the blest does the hero [Modin] gain the vision which enables him to choose to cross back again and rejoin the wretched" (Colmer, 1980:84). Through the process of exploiting Solo's journey of life as a Chorus-oriented creative technique, Armah sustains eclectically the vision that cross-racial marriages and relationships are fated to dismal failure. Thus the Aimee-Modin relationship is called "funny" and the Solo-Sylvia relationship fails (pp.62-63). Sylvia's Portuguese friends and relatives in rejecting her relationship with Solo argue that "She has no right to throw herself away like that" (p.66). Solo describes Sylvia's rejection of him after the confrontation with Maria as follows: "It did not come to me as a shocking thing, her going away, when I was able to come out of the vagueness that was everywhere after her departure. Then it seemed such a natural event, that I was amazed at myself — that I could have thought anything



else possible." (p.67)

Also revealed by Armah's eclectic exploitation of Dr Lynch is the theme of the Middle passage metaphor of metaphysical blindness and misguided self-centredness. The Akan mask with Ananse (the Protean Spider) design which Dr Lynch owns but does not understand is self-consciously delineated to suggest naivete. To put it differently, the Black racial culture and history have become disfigured and lop-sided: the supreme essence of life is now centred around physical gratification, leaving the head famished and distorted like the Ananse mask:

The design was a mask: a pained, human face, a huge head, huge, bulbous, all-seeing eyes, pained distorted ears open to all possible sound, superimposed on a shrivelled mouth and nostrils cramped with hard control. The Limbs-- emaciated, reduced to spindly lines--were attached directly to the human spiderhead. The design gave the creature no chest, no stomach, no groin. From its existence of pain the faculties lodged in those organs had been subtracted by the carver. There were just eight crawly, elongated little limbs about the spider face. (p.32)

The image of the tongueless slave with a gaping cavity kept open with pieces of brass, which the blind and naive slave treasures as a precious gift in *Two Thousand Seasons* is thus reinforced and clarified in *Why Are We So Blest?*. The profound point made here is that even African Americans who boast of being equipped with superior education – which is synonymous with heightened consciousness and self-illumination, it is suggested – have not escaped the historic net of blindness. Dr Lynch's illusion that his secret library of Marxist books has made him a Marxist revolutionary lays bare this ancient disease of blindness. Armah sneers at Dr Lynch's "secret" library of Marxist texts which in reality comprises of books prescribed for undergraduate students and available in all bookshops, thus putting his veneration for Marxism – "the whitest of philosophies" (p.163) – down to naivete. Dr Lynch's exploitation of sex as a revolutionary counter-attack, or racial retaliation, is linked to the Ghanaian folk trickster hero Ananse's roguish antics. Armah's position on Marxism is elaborately outlined in his long essay entitled "Masks and Marx" (1984). Armah argues that the Marxism is a racist political ideology which deliberately incorporates negative features of the Third World in order to present these areas as backward and underdeveloped, possessing no conditions necessary for revolutionary transformation. Wright elucidates Armah's rejection of the Marxist ideology as follows:

Armah is concerned here to rescue the universal occurrences of revolution and communism, and of systematic thinking about the, from those Marxist monopolies which have recently become a significant variant on Western intellectual proprietorship in African ideological circles. His argument is that Marxism, demonstrably, as colonial-imperialist, assimilationist-Eurocentric, and racist-evolutionist as its capitalist counterpart, and is equally unhistorical in its thinking about non-Western peoples and its unexamined assumption that the world and civilization are coterminous with the West. (Wright, 1989:268)

Thus, Armah takes apart step by step Marxist myths and their mystifying slogans by subjecting them to the microscopic searchlight of non-Western world's revolutionary theory and practice. First of all, Armah contemptuously discounts the tenets of peasant naivete and stupidity and the view that only the urban working class is endowed with the experience and intelligence to bring about a revolution – a fallacious and unhistorical assumption which dismisses peasant communism as both primitive and fetishistic. Armah is particularly disturbed by the Marxist dogma that economic glut and not scarcity is the prerequisite for popular growth of communism, which requires sharing of the economic produce of the nation. Economic glut as a precondition to the development of communist revolution, effectively excludes Africa and the rest of the Third World countries from communist revolutionary development. In his *Art and Ideology in the African Novel* (1985), Emmanuel Ngara endorses my view that Armah dismisses Marxism when he asserts that “In actual fact Marxism is rejected in *Why Are We So Blest?* as ‘the whitest of philosophies’ (p. 163) (Ngara, 1985:52).

Owing to this discredited portrayal of Marxism, it is a misreading of Armah's fiction to suggest that Marxist ideology influences the political rationalization of his works. The theoretical undercurrent of Armah's works is Frantz Fanon's Third World politics of decolonization, which are propounded in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). Commenting on Armah's debt to Fanon in his postcolonial three novels, Lazarus asserts that “Any attempt to delineate the conceptual horizon of these three novels must take the work of Frantz Fanon as its point of departure” (Lazarus, 1990:27). In his essay “Fanon the Awakener” (1969), Armah candidly acknowledges his debt to Fanon and declares that unless Africa reads and understands Fanon's writings, “we'll never get where we need to go. We may move without him, but only blindly, wasting energy” (Armah, 1969:5). Perhaps, I must add that in his “African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific” (1967), Armah lampoons the bogus Marxist-Socialist political

leaders of Africa, who use this ideological stance in legitimization of their corrupt and repressive regimes.

The wisdom of Ananse is grounded on both selfishness and misguidedness. There is a folktale of Ananse deciding to be the keeper of all forms of wisdom in the world. Thus he goes through the length and breadth of the world collecting wisdom into a big gourd which hangs from a rope around his neck and is tied to his huge belly. His plan was to store wisdom at the top of a tall palm tree, the home of the Ananse family. According to the folktale, after Ananse was satisfied that he had collected all wisdom, he tried to climb the tree to the top but was prevented by the gourd of wisdom tied to his belly: "At this point his [eleven-year old] son Ntikuma, who was looking up from below, called in a shrill voice: 'Father, if you really had all the wisdom in the world up there with you, you would have tied that gourd on your back'" (Basil Davidson, 1969:23). In a fit of anger at the thought that his attempt to be the keeper the world's wisdom had failed, Ananse let go the gourd which fell and shattered into pieces, releasing back into the world the wisdom he had so painstakingly collected.

Like Ananse, the Black intellectual, Armah suggests, suffers from both mental sterility and misguided wisdom which he misapplies. This view is confirmed by Barthold (1981:170) when she asserts that "The 'wisdom of Ananse' is a misguided, self-centred wisdom that often loses touch with reality". Dr Lynch, according to Barthold, "... has his own calabash [gourd] in his secret library. But in Modin's words, it contains only the wisdom of 'the white desert'". Dr Lynch, "Caught in the white net of minds", ironically seeks a "break for his spirit..." (p.163). The web of Ananse becomes a circle of imprisonment rather than reciprocity, and Lynch's attempt to escape from it enmeshed him further" (Barthold, 1981:171). Armah's representation of the been-tos, who form the backbone of the first generation of African political leaders, savagely subverts the fountainheads of Africa's liberation freedom struggles: The Kwame Nkrumahs, the Kamuzu Bandas, the Nnandi Azikiwes, the Leopold Senghors and others, who were all been-tos.

Armah links the creative and revolutionary impotence of the African intelligentsia with the theme of committed artists. Using Solo as the focalizer, Armah manipulates the need to pursue the truth at the price of becoming anti-African or anti-nationalistic. This view is substantiated by what Solo

says in *Why Are We So Blest?* about the creative role of the African artist and the beauty-truth impulses of “fictional generalization of reality”:

Why not simply accept the fate of an artist, and like a Western seer, close my eyes to everything around, find relief in discrete beauty, and make its elaboration my vocation? Impossible.... I hear the call of that art too. But in the world of my people that most important first act of creation, that rearrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed to falseness, remains to be done.... In this wreckage there is no creative art outside the destruction of destroyers. In my people's world, revolution would be the only art, revolutionaries the only creators. All else is part of Africa's destruction (p. 231).

The desire to pursue the truth at the expense of the European canonical aesthetics and traditional African notion of respect for our rulers appears to direct a number of other radically-oriented African writers too, such as Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. The question to consider is: should the revolutionary-committed artist pursue this goal – the truth – even if portraying it has the potential to subvert the well-being of Africa? Should the committed African artist pursue the truth at the price of destroying the pride and the image of Africa? These questions highlight the thesis of the disfigurement of Africa in Armah's five novels, particularly *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. The nation is nothing but a fragment of the whole of Africa and not worth dying for. This perception is not only sustained by all the characters in the saga but is acted out in real situations. Isanusi and his men fight the destructive forces of King Koranche and his European allies but refuse to rule Anoa, leaving the vacuum to be filled up by the retarded Bradford George and temporarily by Kamuzu. Similarly, the slave King Ababio's arrest for Appia's murder leaves the Esuano "stool" vacant. But both Densu and Araba Jesiwa, to whom the stool is offered, reject it. Their refusal closes the rapture in the deadly web of corrosive power, leaving the wheels of destruction to proceed uninterrupted. General Asamoah Nkwanta's betrayal by the Royal House of Asante and his spiritual demise reinforces the futility of dying for a nation run by a horde of parasites, atrophied and blind enough to sell a whole empire for their personal interests. Solo and Modin affirm this vision and so do Baako and the Man in Armah's other novels.

The saga has literally forced open the putrid dark belly of Black heritage, revealing to the world the infamy of the past and the corruption of the present, usually reserved for only the insiders. Any

conservative Black African nationalist who has studied Armah's corpus, particularly the two novelistic histories, *Why Are We So Blest?*, and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, might be justified in accusing Armah of having committed the fictional crime of iconoclasm and vilification of Africa. Armah's exposure of the ugly visionary sensibilities of the Black past and present is not inadvertently committed. It is premeditated, deliberate, and intentional. Solo, the surrogate author of *Why Are We So Blest?*, is aware of this dilemma:

It is true that if I wrote the things I have seen and the stories that have passed through my mind they would immediately come to me, asking with unbelief how any son of the land, no matter how low he had fallen, could do such a grave disservice to the revolution and so callously mutilate the embryo of the future country in the pursuit of a personal vocation.(p.13)

By manipulating Solo's musing about the perennial problem which faces the African artist, the dilemma of telling the truth, however hurtful it might be to Africa's nationalist liberation struggles and to the reclamation of Africa's lost pride and image, Armah boldly confronts the question of the need to reveal the absolute truth about Africa. By exposing the corruption and the exploitative antics of the leaders of the nationalist liberation movements and by linking them with the rest of postcolonial African leadership's betrayal of Africa, Armah's dragnet of fictional disfigurement nets all the African ruling elites: the pre-colonial kings and emperors, the contemporary political leaders, and the leadership of nationalist liberation politics.

Like the "soft voiced one", who invests his emaciated deceased life in *Two Thousand Seasons* so that the captured initiate slaves could benefit from his death, Armah threads the same thematic path, using Modin as the focalizer. In his diary entry Modin toys with the idea of investing his life so that those after him may harvest the fruits of his death. Acting as a Chorus to Modin's visionary concerns, Solo confirms Modin's notion of a man investing his death for the redemption of those not yet born: "If only we had the sense to choose a better way of investing our death" (p.208). Modin records the proposal as follows:

Outside of investing my death in an ongoing effort to change things as they are, it wouldn't matter much what kind of death I chose: what kind of addiction I chose. Could be drugs, could be success within the killing system, i.e., craving the white man's approval. All existent methods are absurd and deadly outside of a revolutionary commitment to Africa. (p. 31)

But this is not to be, for Modin dies a wasteful, meaningless, and equally agonizing death when the death-dealing demonic French soldiers castrate him in the torrid vastness on the Sahara with a piece of a wire and leave him to bleed to death. The theme of Armah's ideas being rehearsed throughout the saga takes on a heightened dimension when *Why Are We So Blest?* suggests rather explicitly how the corpus should be treated as one single mosaic/system:

"The beauty comes from the patterns," he continued.

"Each little bit of it down there, taken by itself, is nothing. In fact most of the parts are just ugly when considered singly. But when we draw back and take a look at the whole, the patterns become clear, like the whole of an anthill seen at once, and then we are free to admire the complete picture." (p.46)

Besides the thematic unity, this is also a criticism of Solo's ability as a been-to who lives (away from the communal dirt, the *Medina*) in the plush European sector of Laccryville, Mount Olympus. Solo fails to appreciate the plight of the populace living in "the filthy plains of mediocrity" (Tartarus). The absurdity of the journeys of life of the principal character are re-enacted by Armah when he describes life's movement as a space "to turn in circles, again, again, again" (p.84). As if this meaninglessness which dogs the lives of Solo, Modin and Aimee is not enough, we are told that these characters are trapped in a corrosive cycle of disintegration. Solo tells us that "Life has lost the sustaining swing; it is a long time since it became one long downward slide. Along the way everything turned ashen, barren, white" (p. 78). The futility and the cosmic sense of isolation are described as "enveloping sterility" (p. 84). The destruction which strangulates Africa and its people borders on genocide because "Europe has no need to destroy us singly any more. The force for our own death is within us. We have swallowed the wish for our destruction" (p.159). Armah suggests that the entire African intelligentsia is tainted and diseased by the Western educational process – a malady which is akin to death.

My analysis of *Why Are We So Blest?* focuses on Armah's vision of the African intelligentsia's betrayal of Africa, particularly those who were educated in Euro-American universities, and the myth that African revolutionary liberation leaders would resist the temptations of corruption and kleptomania which cripple postcolonial African leaders. The novel insists that, when the revolutionary liberation leaders attain independence, their political performance is indistinguishable

from that of the educated elite and of modern rulers of Africa. Accordingly, Armah argues that Africa is doomed to be ruled by exploitative indigenous tyrants who are controlled by the Western powers. If we link this novel to the novelistic histories, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, a rather disparaging portrait of Africa emerges: the ancient kings, the postcolonial leaders and the revolutionary liberation leaders are all perceived to be corrupt and unfit to rule Africa. The exploitation and the tyranny which plague the disinherited masses of Africa is fated to continue eternally.



## Chapter Six

### **Africa's Legendary Tradition Deflated: Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons***

The personality of the African which was stunted in the process [of colonization] can only be retrieved from these ruins if we make a conscious effort to restore Africa's ancient glory. It is only in conditions of total freedom and independence from foreign rule and interferences that the aspirations of our people we see real fulfilment and the African genius finds its best expression.

Kwame Nkrumah, 1963.

*Two Thousand Seasons* re-orders prehistoric Black Africa and the early stages of Euro-Arab invasion of the African continent. Armah's predynastic Africa has no hereditary monarchs, the traditional fountainheads of Africa's cultural heritage and moral values. The progenitors who govern this prehistoric world are elected on merit and are called "caretakers". This dreamlike idyllic society, the text argues, ironically camouflages and nurtures its own seeds of decay. Armah describes the inborn flaws of Anoa's world as "the puny tearing efforts of the ostentatious cripples" (p.6). *Two Thousand Seasons* contends that the inner cracks are later exacerbated by alien intrusions, "an external force" that adds "its overwhelming weight" (p.6) to the ongoing process of fragmentation and decay. Right from the beginning of the story Priestess Anoa castigates the ancient "caretakers" for their innate avarice. During the passage of time this "kingless" polity is slowly contaminated morally and cracked from within, and finally decimated by its own inherent foulness and foibles, which are later intensified by Euro-Arab invasions. The eventual destruction of the rule of "caretakers" gives rise to the rule of women, the period of glut called "the fertile time" (p.10). The period of superabundance which is often misinterpreted as a non-violent paradise by many critics is ironically a veiled take-off point for a more insidious form of slavery and a launching pad for the establishment of the parasitic hereditary rule of chiefs.

*Two Thousand Seasons* is structured around Anoa's prophecy. The Janus-faced visionary voices of Priestess Anoa foretell both doom and emancipation and redemption for Armah's world. While the voice of adversity predicts that the Black race's stream of life will be violently terminated by "two thousand seasons" of slavery, brutality and destruction (p.17), the voice of redemption,

promises a faint ray of hope. Freedom will be gained, Anoa tells us, through the collective struggles of all the hunted after two thousand seasons of servitude (p.205). Armah's Africa is doomed to succumb to this inevitable period of holocaust before attaining the communal retrieval of "the way", the collective ethos which had been slowly corroded, neglected and suppressed for centuries before the advent of the Arabs and the Europeans. "The Way" also can be defined as the collective primeval essence of the ultimate truth about Africa – the universally canonized unknowable truth about Africa. The only people in the society who still have a fuzzy recollection of this ancient way of life are the visionaries, the sages and the seers: insiders who know the password of the ancient secret magical grove.

The view presented by the plot-summary sketched above is seriously questioned by a growing body of critical evaluation. One of the critical objections advanced against *Two Thousand Seasons* is the interpretation that the novel's portrayal of pre-Euro-Arab Africa invokes a paradise. The advocates of this interpretation are led by Bernth Lindfors (1982) and Holst Petersen (1976). According to Lindfors and Petersen Ayi Kwei Armah's visionary reconstruction of the prehistoric Africa amounts to "a Garden of Eden" (Lindfors, 1980:95) enveloped in a "prelapsarian bliss" (Petersen, 1976:333). This critical formulation argues that the novel's racial retrieval suggests a return to Africa's pristine values, that is Negritude reborn<sup>1</sup>. The pattern is again set by Lindfors, who asserts that Armah's social vision is "a philosophy of paranoia, an anti-racist racism – *in short Negritude reborn*" (1980:90). Both Britwum (1975) and Eustace Palmer (1981) endorse this critical sensibility. Palmer, therefore, defines Negritudist artists as writers who "sought to glorify and idealize traditional life" of Africa (Palmer, 1981:2). Using this definition as his working framework, Palmer classifies Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* as a Negritudist work. These critics are unanimous on one crucial point: that *Two Thousand Seasons* represents prehistoric Africa as *a non-competitive and non-violent Valhalla*. Christophe Dailly further echoes the reading of *Two Thousand Seasons* which perceives Armah's fictional reconstruction of prehistoric Africa as "a Garden of Eden". Dailly declares that "All features of pre-colonial Africa pictured in Armah's novel foster happiness ..." (Dailly, 1984:120). And like all other critics who interpret *Two Thousand Seasons* as a paradisaical novel, Dailly cites "the peace of that fertile time" (p.10) passage to substantiate his paradise thesis. Perhaps I must point out that what is being missed by these critics is Armah's *contradictions*.

The last feature of the novel which is contemptuously dismissed by critics is the text's portrayal of prehistoric Africa as a world without kings. Both Lindfors (1980) and Wright (1989) fiercely repudiate this fictional representation of prehistoric Africa as the most distorted aspect of the Armah's deconstructed history of pre-colonial Africa. Lindfors contends that in Armah's "legendary"<sup>2</sup> prehistory of Ujamaa" (1980:86) "rulers did not exist; the communities were acephalous, completely democratic ..." (Lindfors, 1980:89). Wright supports Lindfors's critical standpoint when he asserts that the text's delineation of the notion of the "kingless" Akan society is historically fallacious, for "acephalous communalism seems to have more to do with the Igbo than the monarchical Akan ..." (Wright, 1989:227). Owing to the above critical formulations, Lindfors dismisses Armah's reconstruction of prehistoric Africa as "a cartoon history" which "offers" nothing but a "negation of negation" instead of "a positive vision" (Lindfors, 1980:90)<sup>3</sup>.

My reading of *Two Thousand Seasons* seriously challenges the above critical views because they are not validated by textual evidence and are not reconcilable to the thematic thrust of the novel as projected by Anoa's Prophecy. Besides this, these critical comments are simplistic views that only make sense at the surface and literal level of the text and break down when tested against the deeper meanings of the novel. Though Armah's attitude to Africa is characterized by ambiguity and his creative aim is to retrieve the African collective ethos – "the way" – he subverts Africa's accumulated history and heritage so ruthlessly that the overall effect of his renegade attack is the denigration of the traditional African image and the deflation of Africa's Golden Age. The study in Armah will contend that one of his central concerns in *Two Thousand Seasons* is to divest the fabulous ancient African kings of their bombastic legendary image which is seen as the origins of Africa's culture of tyranny and the cult of self-deification. The novel's reconstructed history of Africa also questions the existing African and Euro-Arab versions of African history, and the usable African historical myths because they are believed to be contaminated with either Euro-Arab racial aberrations or with fantastic misrepresentations of Africa's autocratic kings.

I also challenge the interpretation that the novel's portrayal of prehistoric Africa as a world without kings presents a warped interpretation of African history, for there is recorded historical evidence which validates the thesis that like Europe, Africa experienced a predynastic epoch in its historical development. Armah has self-consciously grounded the beginning of the events he depicts in *Two Thousand Seasons* in an undefined prehistoric era – a period which is normally

classified as the predynastic age. The critical view being mounted here amounts to the argument that because the contemporary Akan society has and reveres the institution of chieftaincy, the Akans could not have experienced the predynastic period. This part of the novel produces no ambiguities or contradictions and this superficial critical formulation cannot be substantiated by drawing on textual evidence from the text.

*Two Thousand Seasons* is also structured around the great migration undertaken by Anoa's people – the long and treacherous migration through the vast wilderness of prehistoric Africa –in order to escape from the desert predators. This fictional migration is grounded upon the historical racial migration which was undertaken by the progenitors of modern Ghanaians after the fall of Ancient Ghana in 1054. Hadjor comments on this historical landmark as follows: "... the ancestors of modern Ghanaians – particularly the Akan peoples – began their migration southwards towards their present homeland. Historians say [that] the ancient Ghanaians migrated to escape the chaos and confusion that followed the demise of old Ghana and also to escape subjection under the Malian empire" (Hadjor, 1988:13). This documented historical material questions Lindfors' castigation of Armah's fictional history as "a cartoon history".

My immediate concern here is to submit the novel to a close textual probe in order to dismiss the interpretation that the novel's representation of prehistoric Africa projects a vision of a world enveloped in moral purity and non-violent paradise. I argue that in spite of the fact that the surface ramifications of the text invokes this perception, the mythological-cum-allegorical crucible enshrined in Anoa's prophecy dispels any illusion of Garden of Eden. Besides this, the inner gaze of the novel unmask hints of textual evidence which question such shallow critical deductions. The views of the omniscient collective narrator challenge the paradise thesis. The narrator's assertion – "our knowledge" of the origins "is fragile" because either "all is in fragments" or "completely lost in that ashen time" – supports this dismissal of the paradisaic interpretation:

Nothing good has come to us of that first time. The remembrance is of a harsh time, horrid, filled with pains for which no rememberer found a reason, chocked with the greed, laziness, the contempt for justice of men glad to indulge themselves at the expense of their own people. The time's tale is of jealous, cowardly men determined to cling to power, and the result of that determination: the slaughter of honest people, the banishment of honest words, the raising of flattery and lies into the authorized currency of the time, the reduction of public

life to an unctuous interaction. (p.9)

The narrator unambiguously leaves the reader in no doubt as to the period he is describing: "Nothing good has come to us of that *first time*". The key expressions like "a harsh time, horrid, filled with pains"; men "choked with greed, laziness"; "men glad to indulge themselves at the expense of their own people"; the "tales of jealous, cowardly men determined to cling to power"; "the slaughter of honest people, the banishment of honest words, the raising of flattery and lies into the authorized currency of the time"; all unequivocally suggest a social and political mayhem and not a "non-violent paradise". Intent on branding the message into the mind of the reader, the narrator adds that "Below the powerful the ordinary multitudes, in their turn seized by the fever of jealous ownership, turned our people into a confused competition of warring gangs, each gang under its red-eyed champion seeking force or ruse to force its will against the others". This civil war leads to the demise of the rule of "caretakers", triggering the rule of women. *Two Thousand Seasons* insists that all this happened before the advent of Arabs, who are said to have arrived as beggars during the rule of women – an epoch in which matriarchal fecundity creates a physical superabundance referred to either as "a fertile softness" or as "a fertile time" (p.12).

The "non-violent paradise" viewpoint is based on the novel's depiction of peace and material glut which characterize the rule of women. A literal scrutiny of the extracts dealing with this period conveys only an illusion of paradise:

The peace of that *fertile time* spread itself so long, there was such an abundance of every provision, anxiety flew so far from us, that men were able to withdraw from even those usual jobs they claimed they were holding themselves ready for, and their absence left no pain. (p.10)

A fertile softness enfolded all our life. Ease, the knowledge tomorrow would sing as sweetly as the present day, made all willing to forget the past, to ignore the future. Past and future, neither weighed unpleasantly upon our mind. (p.12)

Buried beneath the shallow paradise discourse is the deeper insight, the intended meaning which is reconcilable with the Anoa mythological crucible which informs and shapes the novel. What is seen as a "Garden of Eden", the omniscient narrator perceives as an occasion for lamentation: "Fertile had been the rule of women, but its fruit had become a forgetfulness of our own defence" (p.26). The epoch of physical glut during the reign of matriarchs is deemed only as a nightmare

which enshrouds a more destructive form of Arab slavery for the larger community. The effects of the period of peace and material wealth re-affirm this interpretation. The "softness" which enslaves all life is a corrosive moral disease which turns men into lazy parasites. The acquisition of the taste for the life of indolence and opulence during "the fertile time" has transformed the men completely. The men have now only one goal in life: to make permanent the parasitic and luxurious lifestyle which they cultivated and enjoyed during the reign of women. Another result of the era of plenitude is the establishment of hereditary rule, which replaces the democratic rule of "caretakers".

The other adverse aftermath of "the fertile time" which militates against the paradise thesis is that the men have been transformed into very *soft, fat, and weak beings*, losing all hunger for work and skills to fight and to defend Mother Africa. The upshot of this degeneration is that the desert predators, who had been subdued and chased away by the harem women, have returned. Teaming together with "ostentatious cripples", the indigenous collaborators, the Arabs have no trouble in regaining the control over the land for the second time. The re-conquest of the Black world is more soul-wrecking than the first because a new method of bondage, which produces mortifying results, has been established by the evil desert predators. This method ensures physical and spiritual enslavement. The narrator reveals the new crushing method of slavery as follows: "The white men from the desert had made a discovery precious to predators and destroyers: the capture of the mind and the body both is a slavery far more lasting, far more secure than the conquest of bodies alone" (p.33).

Besides the above foregoing commentaries, "the fertile time" image also forms a part of Armah's larger stylistic technique which re-surfaces with a monotonous predictability in the corpus. The kernel sentence of this symbolism, "A fertile softness enfolded all our life", is self-consciously linked to the patterning of the "softness"—an eclectic narrative device which Armah exploits in the five novels. The words, "softness", "smoothness", and "fatness" have been repeatedly deployed in Armah's novels to exemplify the parasitic life of laziness, ease, luxury, and opulence enjoyed by the ruling class of pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary Africa. These words symbolize infamy and moral infirmity. The novel satirizes a foul and derailed world in which all human activities have been reduced to a monstrous desire to satiate physical and carnal needs. This life-style, the text insists, has become an awesome instrument of subjugation manipulated by

alien intruders bent upon ruling Africa. The reader is told that the desert predators, who train their slaves to become askaris, control them through their physical desires:

To reduce them [the askaris] to things the predators fed their bodies, indulging their crassest physical wants promptly, overflowingly. The predators fed them huge meals of meat and drink and added abundant dagga for their smoking. The predators supplied them with women and watched their copulation as another kind of sport. Such was the askaris' life. From morning till sleep they were either at some sport, eating, drinking, copulating, smoking or defecating... The new-found end of their lives was how to keep from doing anything different from the hollow cycle of shitting, smoking, fucking, drinking, eating, playing. (pp.29-30)

This hyperbolic narrative patterning reveals Armah's preoccupation with the conventional parasitic and debauched lifestyle adopted by past and present African rulers and their hangers-on. *Two Thousand Seasons* and Armah's other novels argue that the above lifestyle becomes the central goal which all African notables, educated slave factors and leaders strive to achieve. The portraiture of postcolonial African leaders as *fat, oily, maggots* demystifies not only the gluttonous and parasitic life of indolence and opulence but also the manipulation of the masses whose labour creates the wealth the politicians corruptly misappropriate and enjoy. *Two Thousand Seasons* provides irrefutable textual evidence which validates the critical sensibility that the vices of the ancient chiefs begot the present vices of contemporary rulers of Africa.

For example a powerful textual piece of evidence which invalidates the view that Armah's prehistoric Africa is non-violent and luxuriates in "superabundance of virtue" is the novel's manipulation of sexual violence or the propensity of the patriarchs of this world for violently deflowering young virgins. The attempt by a progenitor, hunter Brafo's father, to kill his own son because he has been prevented by his son and his ward, Ajoa, the fifteen-year old, from gratifying his sexual greed, reveals neither primeval innocence and virtue nor a non-violent paradise. This view is conveyed as follows:

In the thirty-fourth season of Brafo's life his father – may like disasters strike those among our elders whose greed overwhelms their knowledge of the way – saw the amazing beauty of his own ward Ajoa and grew helpless before his dotard passion. The girl was in the thirtieth of her seasons<sup>4</sup>, a few seasons' woman in body, in spirit still a child. Brafo's father was close to a hundred seasons ... The father, surprised by the discovery, was first struck impotent with rage, then maddened



with desire to destroy both his son and the beloved child. (p.5)

The narrator self-consciously locates this narrative-within-narrative in the pre-Euro-Arab period in order to alert the reader's attention to the state of affairs before the advent of the Arabs and Europeans. Indeed, the weakness for young virgin girls, for which Armah's narrator indicts the Nkrumahist politicians like Koomson in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* also is evident in the founding progenitors (*Two Thousand Seasons*), who form the foundation stone of the "caretaker" government in prehistoric Africa. Armah reveals Koomson's addiction to fornication with school girls as follows: "Girls, girls. Fresh little ones still going to Achimota and Holy Child ... He is cracking them like tiger nuts", (p. 110). The Arab intrusion merely hastens and overwhelmingly magnifies the inevitable growth of the seed of immorality and degeneration. Confirming the above interpretation, A. N. Mensah contends in his article entitled "Style and Purpose in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*" that "In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah maintains that the ancestral 'way' was destroyed before the advent of the Arabs and the Europeans, who arrived on the scene later" (1992:3). In the light of the above investigation, it is fallacious to conclude that *Two Thousand Seasons* represents prehistoric Africa as a world wallowing in "superabundance of virtue". The most positive and solid attribute of *Two Thousand Seasons* is its sustained effort to demolish the secondary position foisted upon African women by the patriarchal African society.

As far as African womanhood is concerned Armah repudiates the servile role forced upon women by traditional Africa. In order to amplify its denigration of ancient kings and the legendary tradition, *Two Thousand Seasons* exploits the subservient status imposed upon women by traditional Africa and its rulers. The novel insists that before the advent of Arabs and Europeans, women emerge as the doers and the saviours who fill the political vacuum left by the caretakers after their bloody civil wars which terminate the rule of men. The novel represents women as victims of centuries of bondage institutionalised by the despotic kings of pre-colonial and colonial Africa, who are always men. This male proclivity to turn women into "domestic servants" and sexual "playthings", the text argues, existed before the Arab intrusion into Africa.

In his article, "The Feminine Point of View", Eustace Palmer elucidates the timeless brutalization of women by the male-dominated and male-oriented African continent – the foul ancient African

tradition which even contemporary Africa fails to stamp out (1983: 38-55). The Arab slave culture and its relegation of women to sexual objects and the subservient position stems from the Islamic religious practices and is compounded by the indigenous patriarchal African attitude to women. The weaving of the novel around the legendary female rebels, particularly the Anoa, and its allusion to one Priestess Anoa, is Armah's creative attempt to negate the secondary social position imposed upon African women. The role played by the famous female revolutionaries is invoked by the brave act of Priestess Anoa, "who brought the wrath of patriarchs on her head long before the beginning of fertile time by uttering a curse against any man, any woman who would press another human being into her service" (pp.13-14). In his review of Ousmane Sembene's "masterpiece ... a film called *Ceddo*" – a review article entitled "Islam and 'Ceddo'" (1984:2031) – Armah reveals an insight which seems to be his guiding artistic principle in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Describing the woman character who kills the Muslim imam in order to save her community from destructive and fragmentary potentials of Islamic religion, Armah asserts that:

It is she – the woman – who brings the leadership the community's men have failed to provide, points the way out of the alienating traps the community has fallen into. ... And in the artistic vision it [*Ceddo*] projects, the African woman occupies the clean centre, a thinker and a doer. In other words, the meaning of Sembene's *Ceddo* ranges beyond history and currency, into prophecy. (Armah, 1984:2031)

Despite the fact that this view still represents women as idealised ideals, the position of women has shifted from that of eternal procreation and beasts-of-burden to a more dignified role: to that of a community of doers, priestesses, thinkers and prophetesses. In Pharaonic Egypt, priests and priestesses, were the fulcrum of the accumulated wisdom and culture of the Egyptian nation and in pre-colonial West Africa, the keepers of the key to Africa's heritage and native wisdom were the kings, who were assisted by priests and priestesses. To effect this status reversal, Armah puts women in the centre of the liberation struggle against the slave-kings, their heirs, Africa's modern rulers, and their alien supporters. For this reason, most of the visionary characters of this work are women. They include Abena, Ndola, Idawa, Naita, Nandi, Noliwe, and others. What we have here is Armah's determination to negate the whole course of Africa's cultural history from the cradle of Africa's civilization to the present – a creative purpose which attempts to reverse the patriarchal tradition of turning women into workhorses and childbearing machines. Armah's fictional empowerment of women in *Two Thousand Seasons* appears to foreshadow and anticipate

the recent works of female African novelists like Mariama Ba, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo. *Two Thousand Seasons* appears to re-enact the agonized words of the heroine in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979): "God when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" (Emecheta, 1979: 227). Anyidoho echoes Armah's fictional restoration of African womanhood when he declares that:

The most prominent of Armah's women – Anoa, Idawa, and Abena – are all living portraits of the *Obaa Sima*, the concept of the ideal woman in Armah's native Akan culture. Armah refines for us not only the role of women but also the very notions of beauty and fertility. Each compels a notion of beauty that goes beyond the surface of things. (Anyidoho, 1986:76-77)

Although Armah attempts to restore the image of the African woman, he ends by presenting the ancient traditional stereotyped image of the African woman. Perhaps Armah's resort to stereotypes as creative tools stems from the fact that *Two Thousand Seasons*, which might be described as an idea-oriented novel, veers away, didactically, from individualized characterization. Even the composite protagonist of initiates led by Isanusi is never given full-blown characterization and operates only as a symbol of communal and revolutionary ideal. Armah's stereotyped image of women in this novel, however, is devoid of pejorative features and projects a vision which attempts to rehabilitate the secondary status imposed upon women by male-dominated Africa. Commenting on the author's glorification of women, Anyidoho concludes that any discussion of collective heroism and the communal ideal in the novel must take cognisance of the "crucial role of women in a meaningful revolutionary program" (1986:76). A textual analysis of the novel's portrayal of women confirms this perception. What is at issue here is how Armah has intensified his castigation of pre-colonial and postcolonial African leadership by exploiting the primeval male chauvinism and exploitation of women.

The rebuilding of the community after civil wars of destruction wrought by the rule of caretakers, we are told, is virtually accomplished by women. The men have become bloated parasites who live solely on what the women have produced and have grown monstrously fat and oily like worms. The narrator tells us that the period of material abundance has produced "a strange, new kind of man, his belly like a pregnant woman's" (p.11). The men intent upon continuing the life of indolence and pleasure decree that women should not be allowed to rule any longer and must be

relegated to "the childbearing, housekeeping destiny" (p.60). And so it is decreed by the patriarchs that "as soon as" a woman's "body showed it was ready, and as long as her body continued to turn manseed to harvest" she must be made to bear children. Those who refuse this childbearing-machine role, the narrator tells the reader, "Their bodies sometimes floated naked down the river in the beauty of an early morning, their genitals mutilated for the warning of docile multitudes" (p.61). The acts of savagery and diabolical violence perpetrated against women by the progenitors of Ancient Africa suggest nothing celebratory about the African Continent. The text conveys its vision by comparing the visionless and unproductive men with the women visionaries and doers. The novel's manipulation of the gender motif further maligns the traditional African leadership.

Armah's ambivalent treatment of the era of superabundance, the period of the rule of women, suggests a concealed insight. Ato Sekyi-Otu elucidates this insight in his essay entitled "Towards Anoa ... Not Back To Anoa: The Grammar of Revolutionary Homecoming in *Two Thousand Seasons*". Sekyi-Otu argues the text perceives despotic patriarchy and blind productive matriarchy as "twin maladies inimical" (1987:195) to the organic wholeness of Africa. Thus the novel strains to point out that what is recommended is not the replacement of patriarchal tyranny with matriarchal domination centred on blind fecundity. Anoa's vatic utterance conveys this interpretation:

"Know this again. The way is not the rule of men. The way is never women ruling men. The way is reciprocity. The way is not bareness. Nor is the way this heedless fecundity. The way is not blind productivity." (p. 27)

"The way" is couched here in abstruse and negative absolutes which are designed to question the past and the present, existential, lived, social systems of Africa. This is not all. In her essay, "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa", Katherine Frank espouses a sexist view which is discounted above by Anoa. Frank asserts that

Given the historically established and culturally sanctioned sexism of African society, there is no possibility of a compromise, or even truce with the enemy. Instead, women must spurn patriarchy in all its guises and create a safe, sane, supportive world of women: a world of mothers and daughters, sisters and friends. (1987:15)

Frank's vision of "a world of mothers and daughters, sisters and friends" amounts to a society

without men – a replacement of the old patriarchal tyranny with a new matriarchal domination. The substitution of one evil with another evil does not solve the problem; it only leads to a vicious circle. The period of plenitude during the reign of women, an era in which men become addicted to life of indolence and gluttony, has devastating consequences for the whole community. It is the epoch in which men become soft and weak, the period which sees the reconquests of their fatherland by the Arabs. This is Armah's way of rejecting the domination of one sex over the other. What is required is equality, not the absence of one of the sexes, not female separateness.

In *Two Thousand Seasons* the ancient patriarchs who rule this world kill women who refuse to be turned into childbearing machines, demonically mutilate their genitals (as a warning against future female rebels) and throw their bodies into the river. Joseph Campbell's comment on the gender theme adds a mythological dimension to the discussion. In his *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (1964), Campbell illuminates the universal dynamics of subservience of women in all patriarchal mythologies when he asserts that throughout patriarchal mythologies "The function of the female has been systematically devalued, not only in a symbolical cosmological sense, but also in a personal, psychological [sense]" (Campbell, 1964: 158):

Just as her role is cut down, or even out, in myths of the origin of the universe, so also in hero legends. It is, in fact, amazing to what extent the female figures of epic, drama, and romance have been reduced to the status of mere objects; or, when functioning as subjects, initiating action of their own, have been depicted either as incarnate demons or as mere allies of the masculine will

(Campbell, 1964: 158)

This citation reveals the abyss of female oppression in the world – an ancient fouled patriarchal prejudice which has a timeless history and is still practised all over the world today. The novel continues its status reversal process in which women are glorified and hero-worshipped instead of men, the personages normally considered by traditional Africa as fitting heroes worthy of epic heroic stature and celebration. The most graphic demonstration of the creativity and the visionariness of women is their uncanny and brilliant execution of the harem revolt which wipes out the depraved Arab predators who turn the women into sex objects. In the narrator's own words, "for them [the desert predators] woman is a thing, a thing deflated to fill each strutting, mediocre man with a spurious, weightless sense of worth" (p.40). The thematic and the

ideological concerns of this unique episode are highlighted by Anyidoho's comment: "The revolt of these women and their total massacre of the predators is one of the most impressive, most decisive single victories in the entire novel. This remarkable episode is marked throughout by the spirit of oneness that moves the women into a singular display of poetic justice in killing their violators with overflowing measures of food, drugs, and sex" (1986:76) – a perception which fossilizes women in stereotypes. It is argued that women are portrayed in the novelistic histories as prophets, visionaries, and doers while men are generally presented as villains.

*Two Thousand Seasons* links the suffering and the servitude of African women to that of Mother Africa. The endless cycle of agonized tribulations which plague African women is perceived as a microcosm of Mother Africa's own timeless historical suffering and brutalization at the hands of her own tyrannical rulers and despotic alien invaders. The most unambiguous substantiation of this view is Abena's ritual dance which closes the initiation ceremony. Through an ingenious process of foregrounding, the narrator succeeds in transforming Abena's ritual dance of love into a vision which invokes Africa's past, present and future. The dance envisions Africa's cycle of racial abortions, the endless cycle of betrayals and oppression she has been subjected to since the dawn of history by her own rulers and alien intruders. The agony of unending betrayals committed by Africa's rulers against their own people is further reinforced and re-enacted through Abena's ritualistic initiation dance of love which is expected to lead to re-birth and redemption. Although Abena, who is one of the women visionaries in this novel, is located in the present, she divines both the past and the future. Like Ama Nkroma in *The Healers*, Naita in *Why Are We So Blest?*, Naana in *Fragments*, and the Teacher in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Abena's ritual dance is loaded with ancient wisdom and insights like the *Afa* divination.<sup>5</sup> Like Prophetess Anoa, Abena is endowed with all-seeing eyes. The insights conveyed by the dance are conveyed through the medium of icons and visual signs dramatized by body movements and facial expressions:

To the heavy, slow beat she had requested Abena did a dance like the dance of birth, the dance of awakening, but as if the birth she danced would be a reluctant birth, a possible abortion, even. For though Abena had more than enough time and supple skill in abundance she never carried the dance to its proper end. Always when the end came near, with an imperceptible change in her movement Abena returned to the beginning, to the slow, heavy, mournful steps of blindness ignorant of sight, the steps of flesh not yet inspired. She chose an arbitrary end when, staring fixedly at us, she shook like a person surprised in some sly trap,

shook with a fury that seemed aimed at us ... and then abruptly she halted her unfinished dance. (p.107)

The enigmatic dance laden with the Akan iconic grove of symbols foreshadows Africa's destiny – an ordained fate represented as a cycle of abortions. Pre-colonial Africa, which is perceived by African ethnologists, historians, politicians and creative writers as a world that had experienced great epochs of civilization, is represented as a foul world suspended in stagnation and tyranny. The ritual dance also foretells the fate which awaits the neophytes in the cavernous belly of the slave ship. *Two Thousand Seasons* re-creates the abyss of the Middle Passage by subjecting the initiates to an actual experience of enslavement in the corrosive belly of a slave ship. The novel posits that although in postcolonial Africa physical slavery is a thing of the past, veiled forms of servitude and the slave mentality exist. Abena's initiation dance also heralds the ironic cycle of reversals this world is doomed to go through, the whirlwind of mirages and the illusions Africa is ordained to suffer before the "Beautiful Ones" are finally born. The "slow, heavy, mournful steps" of the dancer suggest that delivery might not be easy. It might "be a reluctant birth, a possible abortion". The novel presents Africa as a world destined to go through a cycle of recurrent historical and political blunders perpetrated by her despotic and corrupt rulers. Abena's mystical dance negates all evidence of any historical or mythical paradise in pre-colonial Africa.

Also crucial to this critical investigation is the most often cited criticism of *Two Thousand Seasons*: the view that its reconstruction of Africa's historical experience is artistically unrealistic. Many reasons account for why *Two Thousand Seasons* is perceived by some critics as having failed to achieve novelistic realism. Part of the problem stems from the novel's unconventional structure and style. A novel which eschews detailed individual characterization and a single heroic ideal is certainly a departure from the Western novelistic tradition. The simulated epic oral style compounds the novel's un-European structure. Besides these, we have a collective disembodied incantatory narrative voice – a composite resonant voice akin to that of an African visionary possessed by ancestral spirits – which exercises an ultimate control over the text. Although the novel's unusual structure demands an un-European or a non-universal approach, most critics tend to approach it as a standard European fiction. This critical perception is substantiated by Wright:

*Two Thousand Seasons* does not purport to be a "novel" in any sense of the word and to approach Armah's daring experimentation with the techniques of



indigenous African narrative forms with the critical assumptions governing discussion of European fiction is to mistake both the formal design and the spirit of his book. (Wright, 1989:222-223)

The above comment clearly warns against approaching *Two Thousand Seasons* as an orthodox European novel. Kofi Anyidoho (1986:67-70) also re-affirms the unconventional features of the novel by extending the debate to cover other African experimental writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ousmane Sembene and by contending that some African writers insist on writing un-European fiction. Anyidoho maintains that African innovative and experimental novelists like Ngugi, Sembene and Armah have tried unsuccessfully to convey to the reader how their works should be approached.

The didactic features of *Two Thousand Seasons* compound matters. In their *The Nature of Narrative* (1966), Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg confirm my view that the novel's polemic structure and orientation account for its dismissal as a fantasy: "Two persistent problems in definition tend to inhibit all discussions of fictional works in which intellectual considerations influence narrative structure.... One is the tendency to use the word 'didactic' in a pejorative as well as in a purely descriptive senses" (Scholes and Kellogg, 1966:106). Scholes's and Kellogg's detailed explication<sup>6</sup> on the "pejorative" and the "descriptive" uses of the term "didactic" demystifies some of the critics' distaste for *Two Thousand Seasons*. The controversy about "artistic reality in literature" is elucidated by Hayden White's footnoted analysis of E.H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1960) and Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1968). White argues that both works miss the "the crucial concept of historical representation" because they are preoccupied with "... what are the 'historical' components of a 'realistic' art?" instead of investigating "... what are the 'artistic' elements of a 'realistic' historiography?". White further concludes that "... the whole discussion of the nature of 'realism' in literature flounders in the failure to assess critically what a genuinely 'historical' conception of 'reality' consist of" (White, 1973:3)<sup>7</sup>. The foregoing analysis, coupled with White's thesis, explains some of the basic reasons behind this novel's interpretation as "a complete failure" or as "a fantasy" (Chinua Achebe, 1975:13-15). The self-reflexive re-interpretative historical mode – a re-Africanised historiography – which is exploited by Armah is clarified by D.S. Izevbaye in his "Time in the African Novel". Izevbaye writes:

The black world is similarly evolving its own interpretation of history in the light of its past experience and present needs. This is the new black historiography, exemplified in the works of Cheikh Anta Diop and Chancellor Williams. This reinterpretation of the history of the black man has provided the basis for a different form of the African novel – a historical novel which seeks to enhance a greater span of time than was usual, so that the whole of the colonial period may be seen in context. This long shot occurs in *Two Thousand Seasons*.

(Izevbaye, 1982:81)

In spite of the fact that Armah's novelistic histories are obviously influenced by the theses of the Black master historians in their style, his fictional reconstruction of African history does not conform with the recorded version of these Afrocentric Black historians. While these Negritude Black historians are preoccupied with reclaiming Africa's Golden past, Armah brutally subverts this past. Even Armah's "Way", which is designed to recover a mythical essence of pre-colonial Africa, cannot fill the vacuum left by the novelist's demolition of Africa's historical heroes, Africa's usable myths and history.

My major concern here is to examine Armah's bold experimental style and to investigate how Armah manipulates Africa's oral epic traditions and historical experience in order to achieve his didactic creative purpose. Before we go into the heart of the matter, a survey of critical evaluation of the novel's orality by critics, is called for. Armah's stylistic innovation has drawn responses from many critics. Although there are two opposing critical views on the novel's representation of fictional "realism", critics are unanimous about the text's incorporation of elements from the African oral epic genre. One of the earliest critical allusions to the work's orality comes from Charles Larson, who asserts in his review, "Ayi Kwei Armah's African Reciprocity", that the novel is "a parable of epic proportions – in many ways more like an oral tale told by a griot, a song of life and death, than a realistic story ..." (1974:117). In his "The African Historical Novel and the Way Forward", Hugh Webb also maintains that Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* "is epic in sweep" and has a "total epic-dialectic form" (1980:32). The novel's orature is given a further endorsement by Wright in his seminal work, *Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa*. Although Wright criticizes the text's artificial orality he praises its oral-tradition-based structure by observing that the work's "literary form has been evolved out of his [Armah's] refashioning of the devices of an African tradition which has ... an ancient pedigree: the tradition of the griot, the story-teller or oral historian who speaks with the voice of the whole community and whose

legends, folk-tales and proverbs are stored in the communal memory" (1989:222-223). The novel's folk narrative framework is further confirmed by Lazarus's recent work, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (1990). Lazarus contends that the novel's style is "designed to approximate the oral delivery of ancestral community poets" and adds that *Two Thousand Seasons*'s achievement "might be said to consist formally in its embrace of the idiom of orature" (1990:216).

The European critical formulations substantiating the novel's incorporation of the African oral traditions, which have been reviewed above, are eloquently sanctioned by African critics. Kofi Yankson asserts in his "*Two Thousand Seasons: A Review*" that the novel's style is "rooted in the virtuosity of Africa's narrative and lyric arts" and the narrating voice "sounds like a Fante old man recounting some incident from a hundred years back..." (1975:112). Emmanuel Ngara, who is more concerned with identifying Marxist influence on African literature in his *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*, also alludes to the folk narrative features of the work. Ngara declares that "Like an epic, *Two Thousand Seasons* is an amalgam of myth, history and fiction" (1985:115)<sup>8</sup>. The most comprehensive analysis of this novel's deployment of traditions of the African oral arts is provided by Isidore Okpewho in his works: *Myth in Africa* (1983a: 203-215) and "Myth and Modern Fiction: Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*" (1983b:1-23). Okpewho declares that "The narrative voice of the novel is that of 'remembered' or chronicling; so that to some extent we are right in seeing the entire performance ... in the light of the classic legends of the Sunjata type" (1983a:206). Endorsing the above critical formulations of the novel's assimilation of African oral devices, A.N. Mensah asserts in his "The Style & Purpose in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*" (1992) that Armah's narrator tells his tale "In the manner of griots of old! In the manner of Niane's *Sundiata*" (1992: 5). Mensah, like many other critics, discovers that the novel does not fit entirely into the oral epic generic mould and adds qualifications.

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah refashions a daring innovative narrative mode which subverts and appropriates the European novelistic tradition in order to create the right fictional atmosphere for his central concern. In order to translate into fictional realism his artistic vision of Africa's timeless servitude, tyranny and cycles of repeated historical and political blunders, Armah re-creates and re-orders Africa's history, heritage and oral epic traditions, invoking an Africa that is trapped in an endless cycle of carnal perversions, demonic cruelty, slavery and violence. Armah

insists that Africa's fragmented historical and political chaos is fuelled by the traditional African leadership. Armah's stylistic experimentation defies simple generic classification. It is what Alastair Fowler calls a "generic mixture" – "the outright hybrid" (Fowler, 1982:183) – in his work, *Kinds of Literature*. Armah engages in an innovative manipulation of the oral epic genre by designing an experimental style which is a blend of different narrative patterns. The principal features of Armah's ingenious multifarious style are *the oral epic tradition*, *the didactic*, *the empirical*, *the historical*, *the parodic*, and *the African ritualistic-incantatory* mode, which constitutes the dominant narrative feature of Armah's composite style.

To overcome the sacrosanct limited confines imposed upon the griot by the God-given traditions of the oral epic genre, Armah adopts as a part of his stylistic experimentation, a narrative mode which Scholes and Kellogg call "the empirical" impulse of "the epic synthesis", a stylistic strategy which is normally employed to transcend "the tyranny of the traditional in story-telling" (1966:12). Armah's manipulation of the simulated epic mode and the empirical/didactic mode amounts to juggling two antithetical discourses: "the desire for beauty" versus "the desire for truth" (Scholes and Kellogg, 1966:105). To achieve his didactic intention, which is shaped by his postcolonial vision of Africa, Armah uses the didactic mode which allows him to break the authoritative boundaries canonised by the oral epic genre. All textual evidence suggests that one of Armah's creative aims in this novel is to eschew the "extreme form of esthetically controlled fiction", romance, and move towards the "extreme form of intellectually controlled fiction", the *didactic*, to borrow again from Scholes's and Kellogg's work (1966:105-106). I postulate that Armah's central concern is governed by "the desire for truth", the truth as he perceives it through his own iconoclastic-oriented creative vision. Armah's ingenious manipulation of the epic tradition amounts to a parodying of the tradition of African oral epic arts.

Another interesting attribute of this parodic mode is Patricia Waugh's definition of the technique of parody as a "creation plus critique" in her *Metafiction* (1984). Waugh's concept of parody appears to debunk Armah's parodic exploitation of the legendary epic tradition enshrined in the epical deification of heroes. Armah is engaged in a novelistic experimentation and Waugh's further literary observation on the parodic device reveals why Armah has found it necessary to deploy parody. Waugh asserts that "... new developments in fiction have always tended to evolve through the parody of older or outworn conventions" (1984:68-69). Besides this, the novelist

exploits the parodic mode in order to sabotage and transgress the élitist norms of the ancient world created by griots – the legendary world inhabited by fabulous kings and emperors.

Mention should also be made of Linda Hutcheon, the literary theorist whose explication elucidates Armah's stylistic innovation. In her work, *A Theory of Parody* (1985), Hutcheon seems to demystify the technique of elaborate manipulation of grotesque caricatures which teem in *Two Thousand Seasons* when she points out that "the parodic text is granted a special licence to transgress the limits of convention" (1985:75). Hutcheon further illuminates the fundamental guideline which helps us to understand Armah's radical stylistic innovation. She writes: "According to Laurent Jenny (1976, 279), the role of self-conscious revolutionary texts is to rework those discourses whose weight has become tyrannical" (1985:72). *Two Thousand Seasons* is a revolutionary counter-discourse which interrogates and subverts the African epic genre as well as the imperialist hegemonic centre. Armah's novel is grounded on the stylistic structure Frantz Fanon defines in his *The Wretched of the Earth* as "a literature of combat" – "a revolutionary literature" (1961: 193-194). Armah's bold experimental style is attuned to "literary warfare", a rhetorical weaponry fashioned for flushing out Africa's legendary leaders and alien intruders from the annals of African history. Armah's hybridized style does not allow any of the European generic categories listed above to function in their original states nor to dominate. They all operate as modified and Africanised stylistic elements of the novel's African-traditionalized-oral-oriented-narrative structure, the Africanised ritualistic-incantatory style. The most un-European narrative feature of Armah's style is the stylistic patterning I have labelled "the ritualistic-incantatory" mode. Since the collective narratorial voice in the novel impersonates the composite ancestral voice of ancient Africa's "seers", "diviners", "prophets", and "visionaries", symbolized by Priestess Anoa, who is possessed by ancestral spirits, Armah's ritualistic narrative mode self-consciously invokes the language used in traditional African "ritual ceremonies". It is this iconoclastic appropriation of the style of European novel, his attempt to ground his narrative in traditionalism, Petersen dismisses as "a pseudo-poetic pompous style" (Petersen, 1975:334). In spite of the fact that "The scriptural chant [of "the Way"]", to borrow from Wright, "suffers from a kind of hermetic banality, a rhetorical stutter which repeats without revealing, exhorts without enlightening" (Wright, 1989:1320), no critic could ignore the force of the lucidness of poetic prose which opens the prologue. The crisp poetic-prose of the prologue, however, appears to have broken down in the rest of the novel. The communal voice of the composite narrator

intones the prologue as follows:

Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction. (p. xi)

The text's symbolic evocation of the "springwater flowing to the desert" not only rehearses the journey motif which recurs repeatedly in Armah's five novels but also re-enacts the futility of Africa's rite of passage, which, we are told, leads to "no regeneration" since the desert, its destination, epitomizes death. The desert-destination/death of the "springwater", which mirrors Africa's journey of life, also signifies the destructive and the rapacious role of the Arab predators in Africa's racial and historical derailment. If we compare the stylistic structure of the above citation to Armah's liturgical enunciation of "the Way", we notice that the ideology of "the Way", unlike the symbol of the flowing "springwater", is couched in vague, vacuous abstractions whose banality accentuates the feeling of negation that is conveyed by Armah's pre-colonial African essence. The endless exhortations and repetitions invoked by "the Way" achieve neither enlightenment nor elucidation:

Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guests. The way repels destroyers. Our way produces before it consumes. The way produces far more than it consumes. Our way creates. The way destroys only destruction. (p. 39)

What Armah is engaged in here, however, is akin to myth-making: a refashioning of a mythological creative reconstruction which is stripped of both alien and indigenous ideologies. Notwithstanding the abstruseness and the verbal banality of "the Way" it is still the aboriginal essence which defies all agencies of pollution and is buried deep in the African historical womb awaiting racial retrieval. Amuta's view in his "Ayi Kwei Armah and the Mythpoesis of Mental Decolonization (1981)" seems to confirm this interpretation. The Nigerian critic conveys this view as follows: "Armah is concerned with myth not as an anonymous tale of ethnic origins or genealogy [sic] of pantheons of godlings in the ethnic arsenal but as a consistent pattern of perceiving reality or relating with it". Accordingly, Amuta concludes that Armah is "allergic to myth as commonly held figment, a consciously invented belief system that is fostered and

perpetuated for the specific purpose of advancing the interests of the myth-making group at the expense of all other groups” (Amuta, 1981:45). In his “Historical Realism and Visionary Ideal: Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* (1981-1982), Anyidoho confirms Armah’s ambiguous attitude to the past – his denigration versus re-creation/re-ordering of the past – when he asserts that “... in transforming historical experience into fictional discourse, Armah both subverts and recreates history” (Anyidoho, 1981-1982:109).

One fundamental question needs to be confronted here: Has Armah’s re-created communal mythology succeeded in recuperating the “ruined” world of Africa which he has mutilated and dismissed? The non-concrete and non-lived ideology, “the Way”, is Armah’s mythological substitute for the real living world of the Africa he has disfigured and contemptuously rejected. The undefined “Way” has not been able to replace the existential lived world of pre-colonial Africa. Wright unequivocally exposes the inability of “the Way” to replace the real living world of pre-colonial Africa once ruled by traditional notables as follows:

The presentation of the Way is ... marked by a vagueness of definition and a disregard for concrete particulars .... The interminable repetition of the Way’s sacred trinity of neologism – “reciprocity”, “connectedness” and “creation” – is accompanied by so little explication of what they practically involve as a lived social pattern that they eventually become lifeless verbal tags, self-enclosed abstractions which fail to translate into anything beyond themselves.

(Wright, 1989:232)

I agree with Wright when he concludes that “Forgotten and not yet rediscovered, the way is essentially an unknown quantity” (Wright, 1989:235). Armah’s creative mythology, “The Way”, has completely failed to rehabilitate the historical wreckage left in the wake of the text’s destruction of the accumulated oral and recorded history of Africa when historical figures like Emperor Mansa Musa I of Mali and the Akan kings are booted out of Africa’s historical archives. Thus, in spite of the fact that Armah’s patriotic and creative intention is to re-create a new non-elitist mythical cosmology for Africa, he ironically ends by destroying Africa’s past. I contend, therefore, that the historical account which moulds this novel is undermined by Armah’s own creative vision and ideological biases which are diametrically opposed to the real living world of Africa.



*Two Thousand Seasons*, it must be emphasized, re-writes the African oral epic as a genre in order not only to prepare the way for text's renegade attack against all that traditional Africa holds dear and to re-create a new egalitarian mythology for Africa but also to annihilate the European imperialist stranglehold over Africa. Armah's rejection of the Euro-American tradition of the novel and his imposition of native African aesthetics on the sacrosanct European novelistic traditions amounts to what Bill Ashcroft et al call in their *The Empire Writes Back* (1989:38) "appropriation", a "process by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience". The point of departure here is that Armah has not only employed the language as a tool and utilized it to express his own African experience, but he has also appropriated the entire Western novelistic literary tradition by imposing on it his African-traditionalized style. This postcolonial subversion of English as the hegemonic colonial centre, which Armah is engaged in this novel, is illuminated by Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay, "Discourse in the Novel" (1971:76):

Language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker [or the writer] populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he *appropriates* the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of *appropriation*, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language ... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other peoples intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own.

Clearly, Armah has taken the word and has made it serve his own Afrocentric creative purpose – an appropriation and a transformation of the English language and the European literary modes of production of fiction. The tendency of the colonized to use the appropriated language to subvert the colonialist hegemonic centre is brilliantly articulated by Helen Tiffin in her essay entitled "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse" (1987). Tiffin concludes, and rightly, that "Once colonial Calibans transported the language or had it imposed on them, they used it to curse and to subvert" (1987:19).

There is no doubt about the fact that Armah exploits the African oral epic genre in his novel. Armah's adaptation of the ancient epic genre, however, amounts to a deviation from the legendary tradition. The sacrosanct cardinal property of the epic tradition is the glorification of the epic

hero and his world. Armah's artificial oral epic style, which is shorn of all features of eulogy and panegyric flourishes, does not conform to the African oral epic tradition. Isidore Okpewho, the Nigerian folklorist, appears to re-affirm the above interpretation. In his "Myth and Modern Fiction: Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*", Okpewho argues that "Where the oral narrator would with all due rhetorical elan dwell at considerable length on events that call for glorification, Armah's narrator dismisses such events with only a flourish of rhetorical questions so that the reader is not diverted by cheap adulation from the urgent task that lies ahead" (Okpewho, 1983a:8). In *Two Thousand Seasons* the collective bardic narrator's attitude to the immutable African oral traditions is rather irreverent and irreconcilable with the traditional African epic heroism. In fact, the narrative structure of *Two Thousand Seasons* is self-consciously inconsistent with that of the conventional African oral epic tale. Though the text incorporates selected features of the African epic traditions, this assimilation amounts to a dialectical and ideological revision of the genre.

Unlike D.T. Niane's *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* (1965), which affirms resolutely the most fundamental element of the epic genre – the portrayal of individualized epic hero who is endowed with noble ancestry and the supernatural – Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* is structured around a collective heroic entity. The conventional single supernatural hero, the cardinal feature of oral epics, is replaced by a collective heroic ideal which is epitomized by the protean "We" instead of the orthodox "I". Armah's composite heroic ideal constitutes his greatest departure from the African oral epic tradition. Instead of the omnipotent epic hero, Armah assigns the epic heroic role to a group of twenty initiates led by a sage, Isanusi,<sup>9</sup> a plural heroic entity stripped of all the supernatural and the flamboyant attributes of the African conventional epic hero. The raising of a single personage above the grovelling masses for glorification and detailed portraiture as demanded by the African oral epic tradition is dismissed in favour of the canonization of the communal ethos. In Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, the anti-bardic narrator impersonates and dominates the voice of the traditional chronicler from the very beginning of the tale to the very end, creating a historical version of the past which is not only totally anti-epic and anti-traditional, but which also rejects Euro-Arab imperialist historical distortions. The anti-legend narrator in *Two Thousand Seasons* contemptuously dismisses past and present legendary heroes of Africa as "single peacocks strutting against each other's glory" (p.42). What gradually unfolds here is not only an aversion to the usable historical old myths of Africa, but also a re-interpretation of African

history and the creation of the right fictive atmosphere for disembowelment of traditional African leadership. This ritualistic-incantatory style amounts to a fundamental departure from the European tale-form. Armah's equivocal attitude to the African oral epic tradition is articulated by Isidore Okpewho as follows:

In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah acknowledges the power and charm of the African oral tradition; but he will have none of that social stratification which the tales advertise. What we have in the book is a tale in the oral style all right, but one that is intensely critical rather than eulogistic or designed to please, one that rejects the present social history of Africa as unrepresentative of its true character and so projects us, in true prophetic fashion, to a vision of an Africa that is free of its shackles and guided by an ideology or religion.... (Okpewho, 1983a:205)

Armah rejects the élitist ideology enshrined in the epic tales and argues that the legends are deliberately crafted by ancient griots, the ideological mouthpieces of the fabulous kings of Africa, in order to enable their masters to operate above the immutable social laws of their communities. The author parodies and criticizes the African oral arts and in particular the legendary epic tradition in such a way that the oral traditions and epic genre are presented as being tainted by the contemptible ruling élite and their depraved sycophants, the traditional griots. Individualized fabulous heroes of the past and the present, therefore, have no place in Armah's communal-oriented mythology. In his *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), Wole Soyinka illuminates Armah's anti-legendary and anti-élitist posture as follows:

Monarchy is quietly undermined by its historical reconstruction: the past of kings is not the real past; the kings stand revealed as part of the historical rupture, stooges brought into existence through the agency of the incoming marauders who needed puppet figures of arbitrary authority to bargain with for slaves and trade monopolies, mercenaries who could be armed and supported and set upon neighbouring peoples and their own subjects alike. (Soyinka, 1976:113)

Commenting rather mildly on Armah's portrayal of African traditional notables in his work, Soyinka states that "monarchy is quietly undermined" and labels the kings "stooges", "puppet figures" and "mercenaries" (Soyinka, 1976:113). But if we pull together all the threads of the grotesque caricature African kings have been subjected to by the text, the gross distorted portraits of African chiefs which permeate this novel, we might say that Soyinka's comment fails to debunk the savageness of the novel's vilification of the pre-colonial African rulers.

In order to effect "the deck clearing" necessary for the satiric assault against the respected heads of Africa's progenitors, Armah's narrator not only divests his narration of all the flamboyant and bombastic rhetorical flourishes, but he also inverts what is called *the sense of the moment*, the stage in which a portentous event occurs in the life of the epic hero. In African epics, climactic alerts are used to invoke or initiate praise singing triggered by wondrous feats of bravery by the epic hero. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the climactic alert "Hau!" is frequently exploited to signal the sense of the moment. But contrary to the ancient African epic tradition, instead of the expected evocation of glorification and jubilation, the oral climactic alerts only invoke lamentation and rhetorical exclamations. The oral alert "Hau!" opens the prologue to the novel as follows: "Hau, people headed after the setting sun, in that direction even the possibility of regeneration is dead" (p. xi). The setting sun is a symbol that permeates the novel, representing the source of alien intrusions which hasten the derailment of the African communal ideal ("the way") – the Arabs whom the text labels "the desert predators". This anti-panegyric patterning is further sustained by "Hau! What a shrivelling there has been in the spirits of our people, what a destructive fragmentation of our soul!" (p.184).

Another graphic illustration of how the narrator inverts the rhetorical alerts by negating the normal positive function of the climactic repetitions which generate lyrical feeling concerned with pleasing the ear is the incident in which the ex-slaves and the initiates defeat the European slave traders and free all the slaves. This "illusory" victory would have been celebrated by the conventional African epic tradition. But in *Two Thousand Seasons*, instead of the expected panegyric flourishes and exaltation, what the anti-legendary narrator offers the reader "is either a condemnatory ring ... or ... harsh admonitory din so as to burn the message indelibly into the reader's mind ..." (Okpewho, 1983b:7):

But we should not stop the onward flow of work with overlong remembrance of single battles won, of new people welcomed, of the increase of courage for the journeys of the way. For this is mere beginning, not a time for the satisfaction of sweet remembrances. (p.179)

Armah's anti-traditional narrator's creative ploy of veiling his hostile intentions to denigrate and to subvert Africa's legendary tradition by impersonating the voice of the traditional chronicler is revealed by his finished product, which is irreconcilable with that of the conventional oral epic

bard. *Two Thousand Seasons* is what Kwame Anthony Appiah defines in his essay, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?", as the "*neo-traditional*" novel – a work of art which is created in a postcolonial African society by a modern/postcolonial artist who uses traditional tools and materials in fashioning a piece of art that incorporates the traditional (pre-colonial African) and modern/postcolonial modes of production. In that essay, Appiah discusses modern art works in West Africa in which the artists use traditional tools, materials and modes of production to create works which incorporate both the pre-colonial (traditional) and postcolonial/modern Africa. The Ghanaian critic links this art-critique to Ouologuem's parodic manipulation of the West African griot's ancient oral epic tools and materials in fashioning his iconoclastic and syncretic work, *Bound To Violence*. The result, Appiah argues, is an artistic creation which is neither pure traditional nor pure modern/postcolonial but rather a synthesis of the two Africas, *neo-traditional* (Appiah, 1991:336-357).

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah overtly muffles the cardinal traditional epic praise singing and celebration and amplifies condemnation and agony because his thesis is that hero-worshipping nourishes the culture of despotism which plagued pre-colonial and colonial Africa and continues to dog contemporary Africa. The most classic illustration of this anti-praise-singing posture is the narrator's suppression of the desire to commemorate the successful escape from the desert predators and the safe arrival in Anoa after the long and treacherous migration through the vast wilderness of prehistoric Africa. The sublime physical beauty of "the promised land" invokes and forces praise singing from the reluctant lips of the narrator, but he successfully suppresses the panegyric impulse struggling within his breast (p.56):

With what shall the utterer's tongue stricken with goodness, riven silent with the quiet force of beauty, with which mention shall the tongue of the utterers begin a song of praise whose perfect singers have yet to come? And the time for singing, whence shall the utterers, whence the singers gather it when this remembrance is no easy celebration but a call to the terrifying work of creation's beginning? ... This promise of a praise song will pass swiftly .... (p.56)

The expected eulogizing is reduced to rhetorical questions and the warning that commemoration will be premature since "creation's work" is just beginning and final victory or emancipation is two thousand seasons away. The purpose of Armah's narrator is not only to annihilate the legendary tradition but also to correct and re-write the African oral epic aesthetics in order ultimately to

recover an African essence – "the way". In an unambiguously virulent tone, the anti-legendary voice of irreverence presents traditional Africa's panegyrics as empty flatteries and the traditional oral artists as degenerates. Using Isanusi as the focalizer, the narrator scornfully dismisses traditional bards and court historians as mercenaries who prostitute the African traditional oral arts:

Isanusi ... went to the town of Poano .... There he saw the victory of the white destroyers, the utter destruction of souls. He saw there was no fundi there who was not first of all a prostitute. Experts in the art of eloquence he saw bought to speak for thieves. Experts in the art of singing he saw bought to sing the praises not just of one parasite, the king, but also of any bloated passer who could pay their paltry price. (p.103)

What this reveals is the degeneration of griots who have become "prostitutes" hawking their talents and skills to the highest bidder. What is pertinent here is the fact that praise singing and praise songs created by griots continue to play a crucial role in modern West Africa's politics and culture. Armah's spurning of "griotature" (Wright 1989:228), therefore, amounts to a fictional subversion of pre-colonial and contemporary Africa's image. The sentence, "Experts in the art of singing he saw bought to sing the praises not just of one parasite, the king, but also of any bloated passer who could pay their paltry price", from the above citation, however, suggests that although Armah's novel is set largely in pre-colonial West Africa, he appears to be interpreting the past in the light of contemporary West Africa. The degeneration of griots evoked by the above quotation conveys only the contemporary state of affairs and not that of pre-colonial West Africa. In modern West African griots are usually hired by those who require their services, a postcolonial development which has turned them into commodities to be bought in the modern commercial market system. Okpewho also questions Armah's negative portrayal of Africa's legendary heroes and griots as follows:

Armah does come down heavily on the legend tradition in Africa ... The idea that there is a touch of mockery in the glorification of potentates surely contradicts the wistful pride with which present-day griots recall the privileged position enjoyed by their predecessors .... (Okpewho, 1983b:10)

The decay of the traditions of the African oral arts fictionalized in *Two Thousand Seasons* is, however, corroborated by Kofi Awoonor in his doctoral thesis entitled *A Study of the Influences*

of *Oral Literature on the Contemporary Literature of Africa* (1972). Awoonor's critical formulation asserts that some West African oral artists, particularly among the Yoruba, the Hausa and the Wolof, have become "mercenaries": "professional praise-singers who follow their patron through the streets, beating out his patronymic salutations, and heaping upon him an exaggerated array of praise epithets":

They may liken him to the elephant to signify his strength, the fox for his sagacity, the cow for his meekness. If he recognizes their work and rewards them, he may soon be elevated to the status of a lion, leopard or such other noble beast. But if he makes the mistakes of ignoring them, he may soon be likened to the red-bottomed baboon, or the greedy goat who ate too much at his own mother's funeral and thus befouled the funeral compound. (Awoonor, 1972:26)

I would contend that Awoonor's view is only applicable to contemporary West Africa and *Two Thousand Seasons* is set specifically in nebulous pre-colonial West Africa. Although the oral artist who works for the powerful chief does not have the poetic licence Awoonor's comment reveals, his insight underpins the potential progressive degeneration of African traditional arts, satirized by Armah's irreverent neo-traditional narrator. In his preface to *Sundiata* (1965), Niane elucidates the role of the griots in pre-colonial West Africa as follows:

Former 'griots' were the counsellors of kings, they conserved the constitution of kingdoms by memory work alone; each princely family had its griot appointed to preserve tradition; it was from among the griots that kings used to choose the tutors for young princes. In the very hierarchical society of Africa before colonization, where everyone found his place, the griot appears as one of the most important of this society, because it is he who, for want of archives, records the customs, traditions and governmental principles of kings ... among [contemporary] African intellectuals, there are those who are sufficiently narrow-minded to regard 'speaking documents', which the griots are, with disdain .... (Niane, 1965: vii-viii)

Niane's observation reveals that in pre-colonial West Africa the griots worked only for kings and princes and not for individuals. The Afrocentric historian not only sets the records straight by revealing the great role played by the court historians in Africa's preliterate culture and history but also castigates modern African intellectuals who ridicule the "speaking documents". W.M. Kabira re-affirms the view that since the griots are constrained by their own needs for survival they tend to become mere ideological mouthpieces of their powerful royal masters. In her work, *The Oral Artist*, Kabira asserts that "The oral artist operating in a society dominated by kings, chiefs and



priests will, most likely, create a literature that supports the rulers and reflects the ideology of the ruling class" (1983:3).

The novel's sullied image of the traditional poet is not only linked to the general moral abyss of traditional rulers who are perceived as parasites but it also leads naturally to the creation of an anti-legendary mythology which condemns contemporary African leaders as well. The text's extension of its castigation of traditional notables to modern African rulers is evoked by Armah's eclectic manipulation of Kamuzu, who is obviously the walking parodies of Kwame Nkrumah and Hastings Kamuzu Banda. In the most corrosive indictment against pre-colonial and modern Africa – the African oral artist, the chief and his beneficiary, the modern African leader – the anti-legendary narrator reveals the African notables' propensity for hero-worshipping, self-indulgence and praise singing. *Two Thousand Seasons* exploits the character of Kamuzu to convey this vision:

Nor was he [Kamuzu] satisfied merely with our proffered services as praise-singers: the buffoon must have suspected some humour in our chanting. He found an old singer with a high, racing voice to sing for him, and a hireling drummer brought from Poano beat out the words on mercenary skin for his flattery. (p.172)

As if the above comment does not reveal Kamuzu's obsession for self-idolization enough, the protean anti-traditional narratorial voice, intent on leading the reader to perceive Kamuzu in totally negative terms, seals his castigation with a moralistic stamp. The irreverent anti-bardic narrator adds that "When he was not steeped in self-flattery Kamuzu raged against us for our continued hostility to the white destroyers" (p.172). The most caustic censure of praise singing is the text's satiric attack on the King: "Bulukutu, he who gave himself a thousand grandiose, empty names of praise yet died forgotten except in the memories of laughing rememberers ..." (pp.63-64). Both Kamuzu's and King Bulukutu's addiction to flattery serves as a foreshadow of contemporary African leaders' proclivity for personality-cult – a political culture which accounts for turning entire national mass media establishments to instruments for building mystic political images for heads of states. *Two Thousand Seasons* further isolates a full-blown praise song for castigation. Armah, like Yambo Ouologuem in *Bound to Violence*, perceives the epic tradition as a grand political ruse designed by ancient fabulous kings to mystify and transform the naïve masses of Africa into grovelling serfs, who regard their kings as divine rulers. The following praise song is a marvellous example of how praise poetry can be attuned to satire. Its virtuosity lies in

its inclusion of actual praise names of postcolonial African leaders:

We took turns composing, took turns singing the most extravagant praise songs  
to Kamuzu's vanity ... What spurious praise names did we not invent to lull  
Kamuzu's buffoon spirit?

Osagyefo!

Kantamanto!

Kabiyesi!

Sese!

Mwenyenguvu!

Otumfuo!

Dishonest words are the foods of rotten spirits. We filled Kamuzu to bursting with  
his beloved nourishment. (pp.170-171)

The brilliance of Armah's style as evoked by this passage lies in the fact that within the predominantly contemporary praise names of African leaders are embedded two praise names from Africa's ancient past, "Kabiyesi" (Yoruba) and "Otumfuo" (Ashanti). This creative ploy suggests that the tradition of sycophancy and self-deification which symbolizes the legendary tradition of the supernatural and godlike kings as exemplified by Sundiata, Emperor Mansa Musa I, Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I, Shaka, Mzilikazi and others is faithfully mimicked by contemporary African leaders. The first two praise names, "Osagyefo" (which means "Great Man" or "Mighty Warrior") and "Kantamanto" ("Man Whose Words Are Irrevocable, And Who Protects the People), were the praise names of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and "Sese" is the praise name of the recently deposed President of Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Mobutu Sese Seko. "Mwenyenguvu" – a praise epithet which is a modern Swahili concoction, literally meaning "the Owner of Strength", is intended to caricature the East African political leaders like Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta and Milton Obote. The novel maintains that the past is frozen in the present – a view which suggests that postcolonial Africa is perceived as an extension of pre-colonial and colonial Africa. In his work entitled *The New Leaders of Africa* (1961), Rolf Italiaander lists the multifarious praise appellations of Nkrumah as follows: "Today his [Nkrumah's] full name is President *Osagyefo* (Great Man, Who Assembles the Army) *Kukudurini* (Man of Courage, Unfrightened, Brave) *Kantamanto* (Man Whose Words Are Irrevocable, And Who Protects the People) *Kasapieko* (Man of Final Words, Who Says Things Only Once) *Oyeadieyie* (Man of Action, Who Does Things Right) *Nufeno* (Strongest of All, Who Surpasses Everybody) Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Liberator and Founder of Ghana" (Italiaander,

1961:227). Kamuzu obviously is not only Kamuzu Banda's parody but also Nkrumah's double. This long motley of grotesque praise epithets unmasks the unprecedented height of Nkrumah's addiction to personality cult and self-deification.

In a more elaborately caricatured praise song, modelled on the Shakan *izibongo*, the narrator further indicts African rulers for their obsession with self-glorification and self-indulgence. The narrator intones: "... we chanted more elaborate praises .... / Osagyefo, courageous, skilled one who arrives to pulverize the enemy just when the enemy is exulting in imminent victory.... / Mzee, wisdom's own keeper" (p.172). It is interesting to observe that "Mzee", which literally means "Old Man", was the late President Jomo Kenyetta's praise appellation. Armah loathes how the first generation of African leaders have copied the blemishes of legendary kingship rituals – an ancient despotic political culture grounded on servitude.

Armah's symbiotic manoeuvre of Kamuzu's portraiture and the symbol of the old slave castle achieves a synthesizing of the three epochs of Africa's servitude and despotism. The text's reconstruction of history is governed by its didactic and propagandistic orientation. Hence, the past is re-interpreted in terms of the present. The author's exploitation of the symbol of the old slave castle, a Middle Passage metaphor which exercises a proprietorship over Armah's fiction, is elucidated by Lemuel A. Johnson in his "The Middle Passage in African Literature". Johnson declares that "Ouologuem and Armah ... come to focus on grotesque marches which transform the continent into endless 'Trails of Tears' and sadism", the demonic, murky circuits of slavery which "lead, ineluctably to final solutions in 'factories' and ships". Johnson adds the coda to his demystification project: "The most important and celebrated of these factories, 'castles' [forts], still stand along the 'gold coast' of Ghana" (Johnson, 1980:70). As Johnson rightly points out, what "gives Armah's political vision an especial immediacy" is the presence of "these castles" along the coast of contemporary Ghana. Perhaps we may add that this immediacy is further heightened by the fact that Christianborg (slave) Castle in Accra has become since the era of the legendary nationalist hero of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, the official residence of Ghanaian heads of state. This accounts for Armah's ingenious exploitation of the old slave castle, an ominous and omnipotent backdrop of the five novels, which dwarfs all the landmarks of Armah's fictional world.

Armah's multifaceted portrayal of Kamuzu is a brilliant creative ploy designed to reinforce the view that Africa's past foibles beget the present moral and political bankruptcy of the continent. Although Kamuzu represents the political culture of contemporary Africa, by making him play the role of historical figures of the past and that of contemporary African political leaders, Armah succeeds in unifying the repeated historical weaknesses of pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial Africa. The protean narrator who speaks here under the guise of the anti-slavery initiates, led by Isanusi, reveals the parodic mode of the text. The relevant narrative is cited in full because it illuminates the novel's ingenious handling of the parodic technique as an act of irreverence and as an instrument of criticism:

Thirty of us went with Isanusi: for Kamuzu's angry chieftain friend, the fabled one thirsty for hot blood, he was to be Isanusi himself. Fantastic we look in our special robes – robes capacious... Incredible we looked, but none more amazing to sight than Isanusi himself. Hau! What an imbecility always is the high ceremony of state and royalty...

Is it not enough just to say Isanusi was dressed with all the foolish magnificence of royalty? ... On his head he wore a high, gilded hat, woven in imitation of a crown. A rainbow would have turned white with envy to behold his long robe.... Fool's gold glittered hoarser than the red; a deep, false blue struggled to push the brighter colours into obscurity ... But the most unashamedly royal adornment was this: pieces of broken metal, even bits from some white destroyer's shattered mirror, all were sewn in patches into the screaming pattern of the gown proclaiming brilliant royalty ... On the wearer's ankles small, high-pitched bells tinkled with every step he took. Nor did Isanusi forget to add to his accoutrement a long fly-whisk, indispensable tool of all flyblown leadership. (pp. 162-163)

This narrative embodies the different historical symbols of self-glorification which have been used by African rulers and notables from ancient times to the present. The text, intent on drawing the reader's attention to the need to go into an elaborate description of Isanusi's grotesque "royal" robe, deploys a caricaturist narrative technique, aimed at destroying the reader's illusion of the text's imitation of reality: "Is it not enough just to say Isanusi was dressed with all the foolish magnificence of royalty?" In other words, the narrator is determined to give us the bizarre visual image of the ostentatious attributes of traditional African royalty. A careful textual analysis of this innovative narrative technique reveals a number of interesting insights.

The phrase the "angry chieftain friend, the fabled one thirsty for hot blood" parodies and ridicules

the legendary warrior heroes of traditional Africa whom the novel presents as empty ostentatious beings who conceal their hollowness under grandiose worthless praise names and bloodthirstiness. Isanusi's robe itself mimics the traditional ceremonial gear of the Akan chiefs. With the fastidiousness of an accomplished parodist, the narrator tells us that Isanusi, the seer, masquerading as a chieftain, "wore a high, gilded hat, woven in imitation of a crown". The same mode of caricature is employed when Armah satirizes the Fante chiefs in *The Healers* or when Armah describes the European-ethos-addicted guests who attend the outdoor ceremony in *Fragments*. The text's description of the hat suggests a carbon copy of the golden crown-like hats traditionally worn by Akan paramount chiefs. The disrespectful narrator then seals his sarcastic attack on the ostentation and self-glorification of the ancient chiefs of Africa with a brazen scorn: "A rainbow would have turned white with envy to behold his long robe" (p. 162). The hideousness of the "royal robe" which is crafted by Isanusi underpins the African royalty's diabolical craving for personal grandeur and the insane desire to inflate their hollow image to weird proportions. We are told that Isanusi's royal "accoutrement" is studded with "pieces of broken metal, even bits from some white destroyer's shattered mirror, all were sewn in patches into the screaming pattern of the gown proclaiming brilliant royalty" (p. 163). Armah's reference to Isanusi's fly-whisk, "indispensable tool of all flyblown leadership", brings the satire up-to-date by invoking the image of such modern African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Hastings Kamuzu Banda and Jomo Kenyatta, who were addicted to carrying fly-whisks.

One of Armah's major thematic concerns is to re-interpret and overhaul African history – a creative exercise which, in spite of the fact that its intended purpose is not only to subvert but also to re-create the past, mounts an unprecedented subversion of Africa's oral and recorded history. Armah achieves this didactic purpose through a process of de-mythification and annihilation of Africa's own historical landmarks. The novel reaches the climax of its de-mythification, re-ordering of history and disfigurement of Africa's fabulous heroes when it links its nonconformist attack with the famous pilgrimage to Mecca by Emperor Mansa Musa I of Mali. Emperor Mansa Musa I of Mali (1307-1337) is isolated for vilification and stripping down because he is one of the most legendary historical figures in both African history and the history of the Black Diaspora, a classic symbol of Africa's Golden past. His historic pilgrimage to Mecca, besides his military conquests and economic development, was his greatest historical achievement and it is overtly celebrated in both African and African American history. J.D. Fage's *A History of Africa* confirms

the authenticity of Mansa Musa's historical achievement when he asserts that "Musa is variously reported to have crossed the Sahara with 8000 to 15 000 retainers, and to have taken so much gold with him – and to have spent it so lavishly – that the value of the metal in Egypt was depreciated by 12 per cent ... " (Fage, 1978:75). D.T. Niane's account in his work, *General History of Africa IV*, confirms Mansa Musa's legendary image. Niane also records that "Mansa Musa I is the best known of the emperors of Mali, largely because of his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1325 and the widespread fame of his visit to Cairo, where he gave away so much gold that the precious metal was depressed for a long time". The famous emperor was said to have carried so much gold that "the rest of the world think of his empire as an El Dorado" (Niane, 1984:148). The African American historian, John Hope Franklin also substantiates Emperor Mansa Musa's place in the annals of African history and the history of the Black Diaspora when he reveals in his *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* that the legendary Mali emperor's pilgrimage to Mecca is historic because it offers undisputed evidence of the existence of a marvellous past in pre-colonial Africa. Franklin declares that "The historic pilgrimage of Mansa Musa in 1325 exceeded all visits to Mecca by previous royal personages from the West and was to be matched by few, if any, in years to come". His retinue "was composed of thousands of persons, a large portion of which constituted a military escort"; "five hundred servants ... each bearing a staff of pure gold"; and "eighty camels to bear his more than twenty-four thousand pounds of gold" (Franklin, 1980:7).

It is this indisputable historical landmark the irreverent narrator of *Two Thousand Seasons* takes apart. The novel's extension of its neo-traditional literary warfare of the irreverent to Emperor Mansa Musa, not only intensifies its systematic dismantling of Africa's glorious past and ostentatious present, but also shows that Africa's fabulous historical figures cannot escape the text's nonconformist fictional drag-net. Thus, *Two Thousand Seasons* disdainfully dismisses Emperor Mansa Musa's historic pilgrimage to Mecca as "a ridiculous pomp" of "an imbecile" (p.74). This historical landmark, which is celebrated in history texts as a great historical achievement, is debased, vilified, and completely reversed by the text. The fictional version of this event curtly dismisses the recorded historical event as "the stupid pilgrimage", and a "gigantic wastage" which is celebrated by naïve Black historians as "some unspoken glory" for Black Africa. It is interesting to note that Black Negritudist master historians are also castigated for glorifying Mansa Musa's historic pilgrimage. Mansa Musa I, the ancient legendary hero, is

depicted as "an imbecile" who hauls gold across the Sahara to Mecca, hoping to display the richness of his empire and himself to the rest of the world. The result of this "moron journey", we are told, is the invasion of Africa by Arabs and Europeans, who probed for the discovery and the control of the source of the gold that was so ill-advisedly advertised to the world by Mansa Musa I (pp. 62, 74). Armah perceives history as a cycle of chaos which generates no progress. Hence his Africa is trapped in the slavery epoch of its racial history. Armah has, in spite of his grand de-mythification process which is purported to reclaim Africa's fouled history, wiped out the oral and the recorded history of Africa's glorious past as epitomized by Emperor Mansa Musa I of Ancient Mali, leaving only his fictional communal ideal, "the way", which, to borrow from Soyinka again, "remains a hazy and undefined ideology" (Soyinka, 1976:112) – an anti-legendary creative mythology which has no place for Africa's historical personages and fabulous past. Africa, ironically, becomes what the racist European historians and philosophers have always represented it: a "cultureless" and "historyless" continent enveloped in stagnation and tyranny. Thus the legendary tradition together with its accumulated history and culture have been fictionally mutilated and ruthlessly deflated by the novelist as mere fabrications ideologically created by power-cum-image-hungry, despotic kings of Africa. Africa has, therefore, been pushed out of the historical linear-bound continuum which generates progress. Instead of progress we have an eternal "storm" of chaos which creates sky-high ruins by "piling wreckage upon wreckage" (Benjamin, 1955, 1968:257). This catastrophic mountain of ruins wrought by "two thousand seasons of slavery", *Two Thousand Seasons* maintains, is Africa's history, Africa's progress, Africa's destiny.

In conclusion, *Two Thousand Seasons*, whose racial retrieval many critics interpret as "a return to Africa's pristine values, that is Negritude reborn", and classify as "a Negritudist novel", which glorifies and idealizes traditional Africa<sup>10</sup>, has emerged as a work which demolishes the mythical Golden Age of pre-colonial Africa. Armah's vision in *Two Thousand Seasons* invokes the three Africas, the prehistoric, the colonial and postcolonial Africa, as a world trapped and suspended in cataclysmic murky cycles of slave culture – "two thousand seasons of slavery and racial decay". This visionary deconstruction of Africa evokes the European myth of the frozen state of Africa's civilization, conveying an image of a world plagued by savagery, stagnation, perpetual tyranny and demonic violence. This critical formulation is sustained by Anoa's mythological-cum-allegorical alchemy which exercises an omnipotent, proprietary control over all characters and



events in *Two Thousand Seasons* – an embedded deep structural dominance which tends to negate all manifestations of progress. In spite of the negative anti-traditional features of Armah's creative finished product, it is clear that the novelist attempts to re-fashion from the debris of what it has dismantled, a new African mythology, divested of all alien misrepresentations as well as the fabulous fabrications of traditional African godlike kings and their beneficiaries, the modern African leaders. Kofi Awoonor's words taken from his poem "First Circle" which appears in *The House By the Sea* (1978) seems to capture the ambience of *Two Thousand Seasons*. "The abscess that hurts the nation" (Awoonor, 1978:97) – the congenital monstrous ulcer of corruption introduced into the African Continent by patriarchs and ancient kings – is more eclectically and intricately manipulated in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* than in the other novels. The mood of *Two Thousand Seasons* is not fulfilment but anticipation; it foretells an apocalyptic vision which looks to the future.

Attention must be drawn to the fact that Armah's Janus-faced stylistic weaponry not only smashes Africa's legendary heroes as well as their historical landmarks but also de-mythologises the traditional Euro-Arab cultural superiority and shatters all imperialist and Afrocentric versions of African history. Armah's caricaturist portrait of all African kings (minor and legendary) as perverts, diabolical tyrants, idiots, and of the institution of kingship as parasitic and irredeemably corrupt amounts to a gross distortion of African history and historiography. In sum, Armah's novel deglorifies Africa and represents pre-colonial and colonial Africa as the "Dark Continent" ruled by corrupt, depraved, moronic, and despotic kings – "those born mediocre", "the congenital fools".

## NOTES

1. Bernth Lindfors' "Armah's Histories" (1980), Eustace Palmer's "Negritude Rediscovered: A Reading of Recent the Novels of Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka" (1981), and Atta Britwum's "Hero-Worshipping in the African Novel" (1975) endorse the view that Armah glorifies traditional Africa.
2. The use of "legendary" to describe the novel's historical construct of pre-colonial Africa undermines the credence of Lindfors's thesis, for *Two Thousand Seasons* is overtly anti-legendary.
3. Simon Simonse's "African Literature Between Nostalgia and Utopia" also contends that the novel lacks historical realism. Simonse argues that "... we find Armah evoking an African utopia that is far removed from actual historical reality" (1982:483).

4 . Since the novel intimates that a year consists of two "seasons", "one moist and one dry", (p.17), "two thousand seasons" means one thousand years.

5 . *Afa (Ifa)* divination is the interpretation of icons from Afa "carved wooden divination tray used in the art of mystical interpretation". The signs are drawn on the carved wooden tray by the *Afa* diviner, known as *Boko* in Ewe, after throwing cowries strung together. The positions of the cowries, determined from how they have fallen on the wooden tray - head or tail - are drawn on the tray covered with a white powder-like substance.

6 . Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg elucidate the problematic equivocal connotations of the word "*didactic*" and their view appears to demystify why Armah's novel is dismissed as "a fantasy" by some critics. Schole and Kellog state their position on the issue in their *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.106, as follows: "Two persistent problems in definition tend to inhibit all discussions of fictional works in which intellectual considerations influence narrative structure.... One is the tendency to use the word "didactic" in a pejorative as well as in a purely descriptive senses. We are likely to think of a "didactic" narrative as one in which a feeble attempt is made to clothe ethical chestnuts in fictional form, resulting at best in a spoiled story. When the term is used in this sense it effectively begs all questions of judgement and appreciation. Our criticism may be improved if we strip the word of the unfortunate connotations it has acquired and allow "didactic" simply to refer to a work which emphasizes the intellectual and instructional potential of narrative, including all such works from simple fable which points an obvious moral to the great intellectual romance ...."

7 . Hayden White's *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 3, unpacks the confusion surrounding "historical realism" versus "fictional reality" as follows: "The usual tactic is to set the 'historical' over against the 'mythical', as if the former were genuinely empirical and the latter were nothing but conceptual, and then to locate the realm of the 'fictive' between the two poles. Literature is then viewed as being more or less realistic, depending upon the ratio of empirical to conceptual elements contained within it".

8 . Ato Sekyi-Otu's "'Toward Anoa ... Not back to Anoa': The Grammar of Revolutionary Homecoming in *Two Thousand Seasons*" (1987), confirms the work's orature by declaring that the novel's "narrative is ostensibly an epic account of the Africa experience from a pre-exilic era" (1987:192). This view is sanctioned by Derek Wright in his article, "Orality in the African Historical Novel" (1988), which both question and affirm the novel's assimilation of African folk narrative features by asserting that *Two Thousand Seasons* is an "innovative narrative, pseudo-oral narrative, a simulated exercise, a literary affectation" (1988:97).

9 . Why Isanusi, who is portrayed as an embodiment of both evil and humane traditional African seer and healer in Mofolo's *Chaka*, appears in *Two Thousand Seasons* as a fountainhead of pre-Euro-Arab Africa's cultural treasures and native wisdom, probably derives from Armah's multi-dimensional de-mythification programme which does not entail only historical and cultural re-writing but also includes Eurocentric interpretation of African literary texts.

10 . This critical view contends that novel's racial retrieval projects a return to Africa's pristine values, that is Negritude reborn. Bernth Lindfors sets the pattern by asserting in his essay entitled "Armah's Histories" (1980) that Armah's social vision is "a philosophy of paranoia, an anti-racist racism — in short *Negritude reborn*" (1980:90). This critical perception is endorsed by both Atta

Britwum in his "Hero-Worshipping in the African Novel" (1975) and Eustace Palmer in his article entitled "Negritude Rediscovered: A Reading of Recent the Novels of Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka" (1981). Hence Palmer defines Negritudist artists as writers who "sought to glorify and idealize traditional life" of Africa (Palmer, 1981:2). Using this as his working definition, Palmer classifies Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* as a Negritudist work.

## Chapter Seven

### A Fictional Vilification of Akan Kings: A Reading of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*

This chapter on Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers: An Historical Novel*<sup>1</sup> is mainly concerned with investigating how Armah has transformed his Janus-faced didactic creative purpose into fiction. Armah's aim is not only to castigate Akan kings for their despotism and adulteration of the cultural treasures of the Akan, but also to indict the British imperialists for their rapacious "civilizing mission" in the Gold Coast. To translate his artistic intention into fictional realism, Armah re-interprets Akan ethnohistory through a process of indigenisation of the European method of interpreting African history and historiography. In order to effect his Afrocentric revision of Akan history and historiography and to find cure for "the diseased and divided" Akan world order and Africa, Armah transmogrifies countless excavated fragments of Akan icons, rituals, myths, legends, religion and cultural history into a tantalizingly-seductively simple novel.

In order to transform his creative vision into fictional mode, Armah synthesizes a complex narrative reassemblage of stylistic repertoires for his novel. Like the style in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the style of the fifth novel is hybridized. Although *The Healers* incorporates elements of Akan traditional ethnohistorical and religious sources and is mantled in a thick Akan iconic forest of symbols, these folk features are not only ingeniously hidden from the uninitiated and those uninformed about the Akan world order, but they are also blended with a host of other narrative modes which further veil the iconographic characteristics of the novel.

The text's self-conscious disruption of its narrative flow signifies a radical alienating mode which is akin to the standard European novelistic tradition of metafiction. Significantly, this multi-layered narrative and the inventive invocation of Africa's oral meta-griots, unequivocally locate the novel within the African oral tale-form and vehemently re-affirm the text's self-conscious break from the European tale-form. It is crucial to note that, though the invocation of the African masters of eloquence suggests that the work's narrative voice will approximate that of Africa's traditional bards, the narratorial focalization which moulds this text is that of "the healers", who represent the pristine metaphysical healing culture of traditional Africa.

The novel's reflexive subtitle, "*an historical novel*", shows clearly that the text is calling attention to its historicity. The historical backdrop of the text, unlike that of Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*, is overtly silent on dates, and the creative ploys manipulated by Ouologuem's work in order to sustain its historicity are virtually absent in *The Healers*. In spite of this deliberate attempt to veer away from this facet of the self-reflexive historical mode, important historical events and historical personages crowd the fictional canvas of *The Healers*. The historical events exploited by the novel are British colonial wars of conquest in the Gold Coast – the Ga-Dangme-Anlo-Ewe sector of the colonial wars of conquest led by Captain Glover and the British invasion of Kumase led by Sir General Garnet Wolseley and the final fall of Asante Empire in 1896. The historical figures of the period such as Asantehene Kofi Karikari, Queen-Mother Efua Kobri, Yaa Asantewa, Asamoah Nkwanta, Sir General Garnet Wolseley, Captain Glover and others also inhabit the fictive terrain of the work, thus validating its historicity.

The childhood crises of Densu in *The Healers* operate as the structuring framework for the novel, a creative strategy which is similar to Thomas Mofolo's treatment of Chaka in his novel *Chaka* – a Sesotho classic which greatly influences Armah's two novelistic histories.<sup>2</sup> This projects the work as a *Bildungsroman*. But like the other generic components, the *bildung* is not allowed to become the dominant narrative factor and, therefore, constitutes only a strand of the stylistic tapestry of the novel. This narrative labyrinth is compounded by yet another genre: the picaresque. Densu, the protagonist, operates either as a picaro without the usual Spanish roguish propensity or as what Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg describe in their work, *The Nature of Narrative* (1966), as "the eye-witness narrator" who acts "as a realistic filter for events" (1966:250-251).

Evelyn Copley's stimulating article, "Narrating the Facts of War: New Journalism in Herr's *Dispatches* and Documentary Realism in First World War Novels", discusses the narrative technique in which the narrator installs "the [witness] speaker in the dual role of narrator (interpreting events after the facts) and character (living events as they happen)". Thus "the narrator situates himself peripherally to his story, presenting the war experience through the eyes of those around him" (1986:101). Copley's insight lays bare Armah's manipulation of the characters as eye-witness narrators and as characters, scalded and permanently scarred by the events they witness. This eclectic stylistic technique turns Densu into an important facet of the

focalization, shaping the novel's puritanical point of view which is conveyed through the perspective of "the healers", who are led by Damfo. The direct satirical hammer blows, which are deployed by *Two Thousand Seasons*, find a new depth in *The Healers* in which they give way to a stylistic lens or a searchlight which exposes the centuries of accumulate ruins of the decayed history of the Akans.

It is evident that any analysis of this novel, which does not go into the heart of how Armah excavates historical, cultural, ritualistic, mythical, and iconic sources and magically transmutes them into an imaginative and visionary construct of the Akan world view, would be superficial. The point of departure here is that the fascinating symbols of naming and characterisation, which Armah manipulates with consummate virtuosity, provide the essential iconic background and hermeneutic key for unlocking meanings buried under the debris of the ancient Akan heritage. Witness for instance the rich mythical referent of Densu's and Damfo's names.

Even the novel's "metaphysics of healing" (which will be dealt with later) and the name of "Damfo", the leader of the healers, appear to be abstractions from Asante ethnohistory. In his "Naming and the Character of African Fiction", D.S. Izevbaye articulates the eclectic dimensions of this technique. He argues that the naming of people who inhabit the fictional terrain in the African novel "can also throw light on the function of names in the three narrative areas where names are influential – in creating a make-believe world, in characterisation, and in the development of meaning" (1981:162). The name Damfo, to draw on Arhin's "Rank and Class among the Asante and Fante in the Nineteenth Century" (1983), is obviously coined from the Asantehene's palace functionary, "an *adamfo*"<sup>3</sup> who was "the head of a palace association" and "acted as ... a friend for" non-Kumase chiefs who travelled to Kumase for kingship rituals and needed a friendly face to help them in the unfamiliar city (Arhin, 1983:8). Thus, it is not surprising that in his present altered puritanical garb, Damfo continues being a friend to those shattered by the villainy of the despotic Akan political order.

The full artistry of the author's orchestration of the myriad dimension of the "fictive" names becomes revealed when the mystic and the mythical origins of Densu's name are unravelled in detail later in the chapter. Suffice it to say at this stage that Densu's name invokes the mystical

attributes of River Densu, the river deity, venerated in Akan mythology. The river god, Densu, is mythically portrayed as a three-headed-and-six-armed man – a composite divine entity, whose physical attributes connote sublime endowments: omniscience, omnipresence, superhuman physical strength and uncanny mental power. The text also manipulates the Asante myth of origins centred around Okomfo Anokye, the Asante Supreme Priest/Magician/Witch-Doctor/Magus, in its re-ordering of Akan history. Armah's indigenisation of Akan history and historiography is linked to his manipulation of the mystical and mythical origins of Densu's name.

Equally eclectic is the novelist's structuring of the novel around "the healers" who, it appears, are distilled from a cult of witch-doctors called *abonsamkomfo* – witchcraft. It is argued that Armah's elaborate exploitation of Densu's mysterious origins, the healers, who are a purified abstraction from Asante's witchcraft-oriented religious practices and the Asante myth of origins wrought by the supreme Asante Magus, Okomfo Anokye, amounts to an incorporation of the myth of the Magus into *The Healers*. This eclectic manipulation of myths permeates Armah's novels. It resurfaces in *Fragments* when Armah uses the cargo myth and the myth of Mammy Water. Similarly in *Why Are We So Blest?* Armah again exploits the Promethean myth. We find the summation of the use of this mythic device in *Two Thousand Seasons* when the novelist centres the novel around Anoa's mythological crucible. The treatment of the mythical patterning in *The Healers* could be described as a doubled-voiced parody and recuperation of the conventional magus-legend – a magian narrative technique which I will explicate later in the chapter. Damfo, the guru of the healing metaphysics, becomes, therefore, an enlightened legendary magus/witch-doctor shorn of all the destructive potentials, leaving only healing-cum-divinatory attributes.

I hypothesize that Armah's ingenious exploitation of the healing concept, Densu's mystic origins and the Asante myth of genesis mystically crafted by the supreme Magus Okomfo Anokye, envisions kingship as a political edifice founded mainly on mystification. Since Okomfo Anokye built the Asante Empire purely on a mystical subterfuge, kingship is perceived as flawed from its very inception and this accounts for its rejection by *The Healers*. This echoes King Koranche's demystification of kingship in *Two Thousand Seasons* as a system of government which is mainly built "on mystification" (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 72). Significantly, Armah's disembowelment



of the Akan kings is principally centred on this structural flaw of Okomfo Anokye's magically-wrought myth of origins. The weakness of the Asante Empire stems from the fact that the Golden Stool to which all the Divisional Chiefs of the Asante Union swore the great oath of allegiance to was conjured from the sky by Okomfo Anokye. This means that Asante political edifice rests only on the shaky marvellous ruse of political mystification.

The African bardic narrator's rejection of the European novelistic tradition at the beginning of the tale suggests that the best way to approach the novel is through the African oral traditions. I would argue that Densu is projected not only as a three-dimensional deity but also as the ritual carrier of centuries of the Akan society's historical and moral filth. In his article, "New Year in the Delta" (1960:256-274), Robin Horton explicates the traditional carrier-motif in which a sacrificial human "lamb" is chosen to travel through the length and the breadth of the community, collecting accumulated moral garbage and willingly carrying this moral burden of the society to a ritual dunghill. Densu's supreme act of sacrifice is not tribally conceived and limited only to the Fante kingdom. The "ritual deck-cleaning" of moral pollutants takes Densu to non-Akan areas like the Ga-Dangme region, suggesting that Densu bears not only the ethnic accumulated moral murk of the Akans but also extends to the whole Gold Coast, and perhaps all Africa.

The point of departure here is that in *The Healers* there is no ritual dumping ground for carriers of the moral, social, and historically-fouled burdens. Thus Densu, the brutalized characters (Appia, Anan, Araba Jesiwa, and Asamoa Nkwanta and his ritually-murdered nephew) and the whole village of healers who are butchered by Asantehene's warriors at Praso have turned themselves into the ritual sacrificial dunghill of Africa – "*Subin, the Swamp of Death*" (p.235) and "*Donga Luka Tatiyana*" (Mofolo's *Chaka*, p.151) – the stinking forests or *dongas* where slaughtered defenceless war captives, slaves and political opponents of Africa's tyrannical and morally-bankrupt rulers are dumped to rot or to become carrion for predatory animals and birds. To carry a whole continent's burden of centuries of historical and moral pollutants demands supernatural qualities and Densu is, therefore, adequately equipped with mystic and supernatural endowments.

The novel's overt surface narrative simplicity conceals its intricate Akan iconographical

background. Both Robert Fraser's *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah* (1976:85) and Neil Lazarus's "Techniques in Armah's *The Healers*" (1982:490) describe the work's structure as a "see-saw" and maintain that its surface simplicity conceals its cohesiveness and unusual complexity. This critique contends that though Densu is not a historical figure, the fact that his name evokes the Akan river god, Densu, makes him a supernatural epical hero who is more likely to operate at four narrative levels: the divine, mythical/magical, the historical and the mimetic. At a more hermeneutical level, the text's invocation of the river deity's divine and mythical attributes also projects Densu, the protagonist, as an omnipresent literary searchlight coursing through the rotten entrails of the historical debris of the Gold Coast, searching for curative measures for the diseased country. Though the major concern of the novel is the hero's quest for answers to how the fragmented pieces of the Gold Coast and Africa in general can be re-integrated, Densu's rite of passage could also be seen as an agonizing search within the individual psychic self – a search for the self-illumination and metaphysical integration of man and his universe. Armah's concept of the hero is governed by unrelieved cynicism and hopelessness. Densu's lonely agonized journey of life and his unrelieved suffering reveals Armah's concept of the hero in *The Healers* and his other four novels: the Man, Baako, Modin and Solo, Isanusi and the initiates are treated as outcasts by the larger society and are plagued by cosmic agony. Armah's vision of the hero is similar to that of Jacob Burckhardt, the famous historian. Like Burckhardt's, Armah's heroes "are always those ... personalities who are governed by their own inner vision of the world and who rise above the mundane conception of virtue. They are either ... withdrawn from the world and cultivate their own autonomous personalities in secret or rise above the ordinary human condition by supreme acts of will and submit the world to the domination of their own creative egos" (Hayden White, 1973:236). My immediate concern is to unravel the source of the healing metaphysics exploited by the novel.

Many critics consider the notion of healing represented by the novel as unrealistic – a didactic and idealistic framework which subverts the historical realism of the novel. But the thick Akan iconographic forest of symbols which informs and shapes this novel seems to question this view. A historical source of the magical founding of the Asante Union by Okomfo Anokye, which is discussed by T.C McCaskie in his "Komfo Anokye of Asante", appears to throw some light on the concept of healing presented by the novel. This source deals with a secret religious sect whose

tale of origins was narrated by Mamponhene Kwaku Dua Agyeman. This worship was founded on "a fetish" called "*Abonsam*".

But behind this religious cultism was an elaborate political organisation which ingeniously mystified its aim of overthrowing the Asantehene with pseudo-magico religiosity. The Asantehene was finally informed and the *Abonsam* priests and the sect were attacked and destroyed (McCaskie, 1986:333). The destruction of this secret religious movement by the Asantehene is echoed in *The Healers* by the Asante Empire's attack on and destruction of the village of healers at Praso. The healers are attacked because they are believed to have plotted with Asamoa Nkwanta, who was said to be under the influence of the healers, to overthrow the Asante Empire. Armah's self-conscious title of the chapter (which deals with the essence of healing), "Witch Hunt", appears to confirm the possibility that the metaphysics of healing envisioned by *The Healers* might be a puritanical abstraction of the "*Abonsam secret devotees*". I argue that witch-doctors of *abonsamkomfo* are now remodelled as anti-kingship illuminati bent on restructuring the society which is perceived to be irredeemably corrupted and diseased by kingship rituals.

McCaskie argues that "the *abonsamkomfo* [the priests of *Abonsam*-Cult / witch-doctors], in the name of Komfo Anokye, wished all at once to dissolve and to replace the existing political order" (1986:333). What is illuminating about this magico-historical source is the fact that the concept of healing as conceptualized by Damfo has the basic tenets of the *abonsamkomfo*. The only features missing are its martial, religious, and overt violent postures which are drained out, leaving only the positive values – the metaphysics of African herbal healing. The bearing of arms disappears together with the wearing of dread locks and the plaiting of hair and the open hostility to Asantehene. But the general preoccupation is the same: puritanism and the replacement of the existing political order and society with a new communally-oriented society without kings.

The immediacy of the metaphysics of traditional herbal healing permeates contemporary rural Africa. It is common knowledge among the initiated that herbs are endowed with "soul" and "mystical" life which has to be verbally invoked by the healer in order to extract their curative properties. All *sangomas*, – the repository of Africa's cultural treasures – are guided by this pantheism. Crucial to this investigation, however, is the mysticism engendered by Armah's

exploitation of the *abonsamkomfo* – a mythico-magico-religious source which evokes "the medicine-man and the witch-doctor", "the medical powers of magicians [magi]" (E. M Butler, 1993:5).

The text's multi-dimensional exploitation of African oral techniques and Akan cultural history is now pushed into the iconic realm of Akan mysticism and mythico-magico pseudo-religiosity. The novel orchestrates the three-dimensional divine attributes of Densu, the Akan river deity, in transmuting its vision of the inherent divisiveness of Africa into fictional realism. This interpretation is confirmed by accumulative nuances and narrative clues which crowd this elusively simple novel. The first piece of evidence, already referred to, is the fact that Densu is portrayed as a mysterious character with supernatural intuition and endowments.

The most puzzling attribute of the novel, however, is its manipulation of the Appia-Densu-Anan trinity. There is no textual evidence of Anan and Appia ever being friends, but we are told of the close intimacy between Araba Jesiwa, Appia's mother, Appia and Densu. Araba Jesiwa opens her inner secrets to Densu about her agony of barren marriage to the Esuano prince, Bedu Addo (p.73) and the trauma of childlessness. The Akan river god, Densu, who is the protagonist's namesake, is mythically portrayed as a three-headed and six-armed man, representing him as omnipresent, omniscient and physically omnipotent. Though there is the temptation to interpret Armah's eclectic use of the symbol of trinity as an evocation of Christianity, this sensibility is easily dispelled by the fact that Armah is exploiting the three-dimensional attributes of Akan river deity, Densu, who is a three-faceted god. There is an ingeniously veiled intimation that the river god, Densu, is now masquerading as three human entities: Appia, Densu and Anan. Densu and Anan are subconsciously drawn to one another by a mystic attraction beyond their control. It is Anan who foils Ababio's plan to kill Densu. What is baffling is the fact that the protagonist does not tell Anan about Ababio's threat to destroy Densu if he does not help Ababio to secure the Esuano stool from Appia. But Anan telepathically knows that Ababio intends to kill Densu and he sacrifices his own life to save Densu. The two men, Anan and Appia, are portrayed by *The Healers* as the externalizations of Densu, Densu's inner psychological attributes just as Malunga and Ndlebe are portrayed by Mofolo's *Chaka* as external manifestations of Chaka. The interpretation that Appia, Densu and Anan are human externalizations of the river deity, Densu,

is reinforced by another complex oral technique.

The fact that Appia is buried in the room of his mother, Araba Jesiwa, whose whereabouts are unknown during the funeral, reinforces this critical formulation. Araba Jesiwa's room is traditionally perceived as her womb. But the womb, which symbolizes rebirth, also suggests a tomb, the final resting place, which signifies death. In African cosmology, death is both a beginning and an end. Equally puzzling is the perception that just as the return to the womb constitutes the acceptance of death, the re-entry into the womb is also a stage in the process of rebirth. Dying is a return to the spiritual world, which is the origin of our life. The court proceedings, therefore, constitute both death in the womb/tomb which is also a preparation for a rebirth.

At the close of the tale when Densu returns from his quest – the search which also constitutes his carrier-motif ritual collection of centuries of Akan historical, spiritual and moral pollutants – he is arrested and is about to be convicted and hanged through Ababio's manipulation. His refusal to utter a single word in his own defence confirms his ceremonial and moral willingness to be sacrificed or to carry the ritual burden for his world. Densu's quest through the murky womb of historical Ghana is also a preparation for a spiritual rebirth – a rebirth which occurs in the courtroom when Araba Jesiwa, who loses the power of speech following the brutal attack on her by Buntui, arrives just in time to save Densu's life. Thus, Araba Jesiwa, who loses her son, Appia, gives birth to another in the courtroom: her spiritual son, Densu. This spiritually unifies Densu and the slain Appia.

At another level Densu's muteness in the courtroom is a re-enactment of the African kings' centuries of wanton destruction of the powerless tribes and war captive-slaves, who are reserved for human sacrifices, and whose tongues are pierced with barbed arrows to prevent them from cursing the bogus priests and the impotent kings. King Ababio's recently acquired gigantic deaf and mute bodyguard, whom Ababio proudly describes to Densu before his arraignment in court, unveils this enigmatic textual insight. Ababio's declaration – "He hears nothing ... even if he could, he'd never be able to report what he heard. His tongue has been cut out of his head" (p.299) – replays the recurring image of the eternal cycle of African senseless tribal war-casualties, slave

victims of human sacrifice, or victims of politically-oriented murders and assassinations. These include Prince Appia; Anan; Nkwanta's nephew; the old man Opanin Kwamen who is sacrificed by the Asante Royal House to pacify Asamoa Nkwanta for the murder of his favourite nephew by Boache Aso, the Asante Prince (p.98); the ritually mutilated beings like the three fatted eunuchs headed by the chief eunuch, Oson, who attend to the needs of the power-hungry Asante Queen Mother, Efua Kobri; Ababio's tongueless and deaf giant bodyguard; the spiritually and physically maimed like Asamoa Nkwanta and Araba Jesiwa; and the supreme ritual sacrificial lamb, and symbol of carrier-motif, Densu.

Armah's canny and eclectic manipulation of Densu, his ritualization of the sanctity of the number *three* (which will be dealt with later) coupled with his enigmatization of series of magical trinities, is now naturally linked to another mythical and ritual fancy – the invocation of “*the myth of the magus*”. I hypothesize that Densu is, to borrow from the dust-jacket cover of E.M. Butler's *The Myth of the Magus* (1993), portrayed as “the legendary magician of supernatural powers ... an archetype central to myth and religion across many cultures”. A close analysis of *The Healers* suggests that Armah's novel assimilates what Butler calls “the ten stock features” (Butler, 1993:2) of the magus-legend. According to Butler, the first cardinal stock attribute of the magus-legend is “*the supernatural or mysterious origin of the hero*”, which “might be divine ... or royal” (Butler, 1993:1). The fact that the heroic identity of Densu is shrouded in mystery appears to underscore the novel's exploitation of the magus-legend-feature of the mysterious origins of the magician/witch-doctor. Densu is a composite symbol, whose mythical origins are further mystified by the fact Appia and Anan are projected as his mystical external manifestations and together with these two “Adonises”, Densu operates as a divine trinity – Appia-Densu-Anan.

Densu's superhuman personality amounts to the text's incorporation of the second heroic trait of the magus – the attribute Butler labels “*portends at birth*, vouching for the supernatural nature of the hero” (Butler, 1993:2). Ababio's comment about the supernatural nature of Densu confirms this magus-legend stock in trade. Ababio tells Densu: “It is known that you're capable of many things, some of them amazing indeed. Everybody says you're strange. That means no one is ever sure what else you may be capable of” (pp. 112-113). This citation appears to indicate the text's incorporation of this stock trait into its textual body. Ababio further debunks Densu's

phenomenal personality as follows:

'Buntui has quite the strongest body anywhere around', Ababio said. 'You, Densu, could beat him in a fight any time. But that's not because your body is stronger. Your mind is faster, that's all. Thirty thousand times faster than his' (p. 114).

Butler explicates Ababio's view on Densu's superhuman mental powers as follows: "One would expect, and indeed one finds among the shamans of Siberia and the witch-doctors of Africa, a recognised superiority in such practitioners, whether intellectual, spiritual or personal ... they have more *mana* than the general run of humanity" (1993:5).

Another heroic quality of the Magian legend manipulated by *The Healers* is "*perils menacing his [magus's] infancy*, from evil-wishers or the powers of evil" (p. 2). Densu's youth is plagued by a death-threatening crisis demonically created by Ababio, who is depicted as a representative of the Devil – "*a fierce, nameless beast, half serpent and half forest cat* (p.60), the Akan symbol of *Abonsam* (the Devil/Satan). Intent on exploiting the mystical sources of the Akan world order, Armah piles Magian images upon images, pushing the reader into the thick banyan forest of mystery, occultism, witchcraft, voodooism and mysticism, and finally evokes the symbol of the Devil himself. Thus Densu sees the image of the Devil in his waking-dream. The diabolic serpent-cum-wild-cat Devil has coiled itself around Appia who is still alive and bares its fangs ready to sink them into Appia's neck. "But at the moment when the beast was on the point of sinking its fangs into his [Appia's] neck Densu saw Appia's face. It was his own" (p. 60). There is an enchanting imagination at work here. What is being suggested here is that Appia and Densu have been unified into one entity: Appia's body-cum-Densu's head. Mystically, we might say that Appia is magically transmuted into Densu. I must add that, at a more celestial level, Appia has been transfigured into Densu, the Akan river deity – an occult transfiguration which demystifies the mysterious relationship between Densu and Appia. Ababio's devilish attempts to kill Densu, the god-head, his successful extermination of Densu's two physical externalisations (Appia and Anan) and his last desperate ruse to have Densu sentenced and hanged for Appia's murder by framing him, unequivocally re-affirm the attribute of shamanism called "*perils ... from evil-wishers or the powers of evil*" which threaten the life of the magus.

Densu's preliminary initiation into the society of the *healing illuminati* led by Adamfo, and his decision to become a healer, approximate what Butler describes as "some kind of initiation". Butler further elucidates this stock quality of the magus-legend as follows:

This [initiation] may be into the mysteries of the occult about to be proclaimed, or into occult or diabolic wisdom. It is a period of preparation and is modelled upon initiation ceremonies .... This period is either preceded, accompanied, or followed by the feature labelled '*far distant wanderings*'. (Butler, 1993: 3).

The cardinal ingredient of this characteristic is induction "into the mysteries of the occult about to be proclaimed or into occult or diabolic wisdom". Significantly, the "healing metaphysics" Densu is initiated into by Damfo was distilled from the ancient Asante *abonsamkomfo*, a cult of witch-doctors, medicine-men and magicians devoted to propagating the Magian teachings of the Asante legendary Magus, Okomfo Anokye. I must point out that *the Abonsam secret devotees* are committed to overthrowing the rule of the Asantehenes, who are perceived to be undermining the mystical foundations of Asante Empire magically founded by Okomfo Anokye. The healing cult exploited by *The Healers* is nothing but a purified version of *abonsamkomfo*, whose destructive features or what Butler calls the Magian gift of "hurting" have been drained out, leaving only the gift of "healing" (1993:8). In the chapter entitled "Conversations with the Healer" Densu is not only taught all the do's and the don'ts about the healing cult, but he is also described in the first sentence of the chapter as "the novice Densu" (p. 92). In its new purified and re-fashioned garb, *abonsamkomfo* still abhors kingship. This is revealed by Damfo, Armah's re-conditioned magus shorn of all the destructive potentials of the hated witch-doctor/sorcerer/jujuman (Mofolo's Isanusi) and fitted with the perspectives of the medicine-man/healer/diviner.

The wanderings of Densu soon after his preliminary initiation into the metaphysics of healing by Damfo – wanderings which take him through the whole breadth of the colonial Gold Coast for the purpose of gathering military intelligence information on British military movements and preparations in Cape Coast and Ga-Adangme districts and his trip to Kumase in company of General Asamoia Nkwanta – faithfully conform to this crucial requirement of the myth of the Magus. The sixth attribute of the hero as the Magus is called "*a magical context*" (Butler, 1993:3). The ritual games context which is also an initiation rite appears to be a modified version



of the "magical context" assimilated by *The Healers*. Armah's account of this trait of the magus-legend is divested of all mystical elements except the text's manipulation of the magian sanctity of the *number three* and its variants.

The mythical and the Magian hero, Densu, is submitted to two life-threatening trials: the bark-poison trial which is an excavated ancient political instrument for eliminating political opponents and rebels and the British court trial – two diabolical attempts made by the evil Ababio in order to kill Densu. These trials of Densu evoke the next cardinal quality of the magus-legend Armah incorporates into his novel – "*a trial or persecution*". "This", Butler writes, "may develop from the contest and reverse the position. The hero wins the magical contest, but is nearly always vanquished at the trial ..." (Butler, 1993: 3). Here again Armah has tailored Densu's heroic experience in accordance with the sacrosanct magus-legend. Densu could have won the ritual games (the magical contest), but he deliberately refuses to take part in those games he perceives as violent, making it possible for Appia to emerge as the overall winner. As a result of Armah's equivocal treatment of the myth of the magus, Appia's victory could be considered to be Densu's, for, after all, Appia is Densu's mystical external embodiment, who is chosen [together with Anan] to play the role of the sacrificial lamb who is violently murdered and mutilated. In the bark-poison trial Densu manages to run away with the help of Anan, who sacrifices his life in order to save Densu's.

This leads naturally to the next feature Butler labels "*a last scene*" which "may be sacrificial or sacrament" (Butler, 1993: 3). Consider, for example, Densu's role as a sacrificial ritual carrier coupled with the host of sacrificial ritual carriers like Appia, Anan, Araba Jesiwa, the village of healers murdered at Praso, Asamoa Nkwanta and his nephew, and the marvellous ritual carrier, the legendary Asante Magus, Okomfo Anokye. It must be emphasized that although Densu knows that Ababio and his gun men are looking for him and will kill him if they capture him, he returns to Esuano. This return to Esuano could be seen as a self-sacrifice. Densu, the symbol of sacrificial lamb, has willingly offered his life as a symbol of redemptive cleansing ritual medium for purifying the fouled Gold Coast. We must be aware, however, that Armah has, as usual, African-traditionalized the myth of the magus through a innovative process which is achieved by text's eclectic manipulation of Densu's name and *abonsamkomfo cult*, which becomes luxuriant

and multifarious magian sources from which the dialectics of the healing metaphysics is distilled.

The last but one attribute of the magus-legend exploited by *The Healers* is "*a violent or mysterious death*". The diabolical and violent murder and mutilation of Appia coupled with an equally violent and fatal shooting of Anan (all murders carried under Ababio's order), Densu's physical and psychological external manifestations, brilliantly evoke the "violent-death" feature of the magian hero. Butler's insight – "The tearing to pieces of Orpheus is an instance of the first type which derives from the ritual of the dying god" (Butler, 1993: 3) – appears to debunk Ababio's carving of parts from Appia's dead body. This is conveyed by Ababio as follows: "Do you remember, certain parts of the prince's body had been cut up and removed. That could only mean one thing: juju" (p. 112). Ababio's satanic framing of Densu for Appia's murder needs to be cited in full for explication:

'Whoever killed the prince needed the missing parts of his body for some purpose. We have met and decided what kind of purpose these might have been. Consider this: the prince was the strongest fighter in the games. He didn't win the wrestling match, but everyone knows why he didn't win. He was too kind to win. Now the murderer cut pieces of muscle from both the prince's arms and took them away. Another thing. The prince was [sic] fastest in the races – at least in the short ones. The murderer took pieces of muscle from his strong legs. One more thing: the prince won the final competition, the shooting match. So the murderer took out his keen eyes. Why, Densu? Why do you suppose the murderer took out only those parts of the prince's body?' (p. 112)

Unwittingly, Ababio has debunked the mystic bond between Densu and Appia. The only difference here is the fact that he perceives the Densu-Appia relationship in terms of the traditional evil practice of ritual murder committed by evil witch-doctors, sorcerers or juju-men with the sole intention of using the human body parts in cabalistic rituals designed for maximizing human powers to supernatural proportions – an occult-dominated religious practice nourished by kingship rituals. Armah's ingenious manipulation of the three-dimensional Akan river deity together with the series of trinities invoked is a doubled-voice narrative which criticizes and re-creates simultaneously the sordid witchcraft past of Africa, transmuting the fouled *abonsamkomfo* into a new mystical order shorn of all the violent and evil attributes. At the same time, the novel appears to be obliquely sneering at Christianity, drawing attention to the fact that the sanctity of divine trinity is not only found in Christianity.

The final quality of the Magus deployed by Armah is described as "*a resurrection and/or ascension*". Closely related to the phenomenon of resurrection is another crucial feature: "Disappearance and reappearance" – "rites of transition, of passing from one state to another" (Jane Harrison, cited in Butler, 1993:5). Densu's long disappearance, during the period in which he wanders from Ga-Adangme to Asante (Kumase) and his sudden reappearance and arrest for Appia's murder and trial are akin to the magian attribute of "disappearance and reappearance". Similarly, after Appia's murder, Araba Jesiwa disappears and is presumed to be killed by her son's killer. Appia is buried in a tomb deliberately dug in his missing mother's bedroom. During Densu's second trial, a trial in which Densu refuses to utter a single word in his own defence, Araba Jesiwa, who has lost her power of speech, "miraculously" reappears in the court room and reveals the gory details of how Kwao Buntui, acting on Ababio's orders, murders Prince Appia and breaks her legs into three. Thus Ababio and his witch-doctor masquerading as a royal priest, Esuman, are arrested for Appia's murder. The net effect of the miraculous rescue of Densu by Araba Jesiwa amounts to a re-birth. Thus Araba Jesiwa, who has lost her son Appia, has given birth to another son in the court room, Densu, whose re-birth is tantamount to a magian resurrection of Appia – Densu's mystical externalisation.

Densu's multi-dimensional attribute appears to be further confirmed by a multiplicity of deeply veiled textual iconic symbolism. The first veiled textual evidence is the novel's persistent deployment of the iconic symbol of the *figure three* and *its variants*. The sanctity of the number *three* and its variants is ritualistically and magically codified in Akan religious practices. When the ritual games open we are told that the judge counts the young men and they are *nine (three threes)*. Then in a self-referential narrative the fact that there are nine contestants is self-consciously foregrounded: "This said, the judge counted the young men one more time. He counted *nine*. *The number disturbed the judge*" (p.10, my emphasis). In a flashback in which Densu initiates his relationship with Ajoa and tries to present her with a guava which Ajoa rejects, the narrator tells us that "For *three* days Densu kept the unaccepted fruit ...." (p.63, my emphasis). Then when Ajoa runs away from the repulsively corrupt Esuman, her stepfather, to her father, Damfo, without telling anyone, the iconic trinity is again evoked by the text when it is asserted: "In the morning of the *third* day after her disappearance ... Ajoa came back" (p.64, my emphasis). When Araba Jesiwa is being tormented by the *abiku*, the narrator refers to her waking-dream in

which she sees "*thirty* thousand exquisite plants, flowers, animals, rocks, and stones [that] flowed past ..." (p.75, my emphasis). The next page re-introduces the mystical *number three* when the reader is told that "In *three* more months there was a marriage between Araba Jesiwa and Kofi Entsua" (p.76).

Equally illuminating is when Densu is ambushed, caught and locked up as the suspect for Appia's murder, the iconic number three and its variants appear three times on one page of the novel (p.117). The deployment of the Akan iconographic symbolism is self-consciously foregrounded by the novel. As if this textual manipulation of Akan iconic world view is not enough, we are told that "*thirty* guards" are watching Densu's hut-jail and that "*three*" of this number are positioned around the hut. A paragraph later, the reader is told that Densu's trial by poison bark has "been fixed for the *third* day" (p.117). It is impossible to suggest that the text's rehearsal of the iconic number symbolizing a triumvirate is accidental, especially when we are told "The poison-bark had boiled over a slow fire at the palace for *three days*" (p.119). This is Densu's most agonizing moment and the image of his three-dimensional identity is again invoked. When Anan sacrifices his life so that Densu may live, Ababio responded by going to Cape Coast and procuring "*thirty guns*" and "*thirty men*" to hunt him down (p.141). The text links the Fante and the Asante plot lines by deploying the iconic patterning of three and its variations.

The text's most eloquent orchestration of this enigmatic, iconic narrative structure is the dream the traumatised Asamoia Nkwanta has during his hospitalization at the healers' village in Praso:

"I see *three men*. They are tall and lean, so tall they tower above the trees behind them. They are solemn in their walk. They walk towards me in such a way I know it's me they're looking for. But when they come close they turn round so I can't recognize their faces ... Then at last they turn their faces towards me. They are smiling. I recognize them all. The one on the right is the old man Kwamen, he who gave himself up to be sacrificed in place of the criminal Boache Aso. In the centre is Okomfo Anoché [Okomfo Anokye] himself, smiling, smiling at me. The *third* person is my nephew." (p.179)

There is the weird intimation that like Densu, Okomfo Anokye, whose initial sacred and mythical customary laws are perverted and transformed into ideological weapons to prop up tyranny and the wanton destruction of innocent Asantes and weak Akan tribes, himself symbolically becomes

a sacrificial lamb, a carrier-motif, who bears the political and moral burdens of the Asante Empire. This is unequivocally authenticated when the mythical and the spiritual soul of the Asante Empire, Okomfo Anokye, is presented as sandwiched between two sacrificial men – the victims of Asante's rotten kingship rituals. Asamoia Nkwanta's dream anticipates how Densu, the Fante protagonist, operates as the bridge unifying Anan and Appia, who are nothing but sacrificial lambs in the great ancient chain of human sacrifices (physical and mythical) which permeates Africa's history. The Densu myth becomes a powerful creative ploy which informs and shapes the thematic structure of the novel. Ababio's surprise at Densu's self-conscious return home to be sacrificed for the murder he had not committed further affirms this view: "But if I live to be *thirty thousand* years old, I'll never understand you. The duiker that fled the trap set for it has returned. Why?" (p.299).

Intent upon pushing this mythical three-dimensional perception of Densu home, the omniscient narrator reveals the waking-dreams of the protagonist during his mind-shattering suffering and mourning for both Appia and Anan – his externalized human attributes. It is disclosed that:

At night he did not sleep. One after another, bizarre thoughts took turns turning themselves into weird images to haunt him. He saw a fierce, nameless beast, half serpent and half forest cat. The beast had coiled itself around the body of the prince Appia, still alive, and Densu saw it bare its fangs to destroy Appia. In half-awake nightmare state he was in, Densu had only seen the body of the prince. But at the moment when the beast was on the point of sinking its fangs into his neck Densu saw Appia's face. It was his own. (p.60)

Though this convoluted excerpt is loaded with many nuances, two of these are crucial to Armah's determination to draw on Africa religion and ethnohistory in his castigation of the Akan kings, his re-Africanization of Akan historiography, and his re-interpretation of African history. Thus the novel's projection of the pervasive evil of kingship has entered a heightened level of African mysticism and religion. The Fante satanic triumvirate, Esuman-Ababio-crier, is symbolized in Densu's dream as a monstrous nameless ogre which is composed of half snake and half wild cat – an Akan traditional image of the devil (*Abonsam*). An interesting illustration is the fact that Esuman, the neophyte-healer turned corrupt royal witch-doctor masquerading as a priest, evokes the European traditional satanic image in which a depraved Christian priest becomes the devil's advocate – the servant of the devil, propagating diabolical teachings. Ababio and his two hirelings fit into this construct. Equally interesting is the view that Esuman rejects the healing vocation for

a royal priest/witch-doctor, which is diametrically opposed to the healer's / medicine-man's preoccupation: saving lives. This diabolical trinity is also the antithesis of the spiritually-pure triumvirate of Appia-Densu-Anan. The mythical bond which unifies Anan, Densu and Appia is further reinforced by an explicit comment by the omniscient Damfo when he tells Densu, who sees Anan's death as his own and mentally wishes to die, that Anan was "more than" a friend to Densu and that he sacrifices his life in order to save Densu's because Anan's "soul looked in the same direction as" Densu's (p.133).

This mystical relationship between Densu and Araba Jesiwa appears to be reaffirmed by Densu's carefully foregrounded reaction to the fact that Araba Jesiwa is alive when she had been presumed killed by "the beast which butchered her son":

A fantastic joy animated him. In pure astonishment he leaped forward in spite of himself, unable to suppress a little sharp cry of infant, inarticulate happiness.  
"Mena Araba Jesiwa! he cried. (p.137)

The self-reflexiveness of the narrative patterning, particularly the use of "infant" and "inarticulate happiness", elicits a scene of a child welcoming his mother after a long, painful separation. It is difficult to dismiss this sustained feature of the novel as purely accidental. Its pervasiveness suggests that it is a canny stylistic innovation which the novel exploits in order to achieve one of its major creative concerns, which is the portrayal of the fascinating esoteric world of the Akans.

In traditional Africa death is perceived as a return to the womb in order to be reincarnated. Anan's death in the river is, therefore, a return to the womb/tomb (which he and Densu had returned to physically in the past when they explored the river-bed (womb/tomb) in order to experience a unified symbolic rebirth. The only difference between the two rebirths is that while Araba Jesiwa is the spiritual mother who gives birth to Densu – a rebirth made possible only by Appia's death and burial – the spiritual mother of the second rebirth is the female river, *Nsu Ber*. This reaffirms the protagonist's mythical identity as the double of Densu, the river deity. There appears to be a creative alchemy which transfigures and transmutes the odd pieces of ritual, myth, legend, *leitmotif*, oral history and multi-dimensional facets of Akan iconography, culture, religion and body politic into a complex work of art. Both Araba Jesiwa and *Nsu Ber* appear to be mystically

linked together through the Mother-Earth motif: the womb/tomb analogy.

Joseph Campbell describes this ancient motif as "the hub of the wheel of the earth, the womb of the Universal Mother ..." – "the ubiquitous World Navel". Campbell articulates the paradox of life by asserting that "ugliness and beauty, sin and virtue, pleasure and pain, are equally ..." the Universal Mother's "production" (1957:43-44). All these evoke the pairs of opposites which inform this novel. The most overt illustration of this cosmic antithesis is the text's stereotyped manipulation of the female river *Nsu Ber* and the male river, *Nsu Nyin*. The female river is portrayed as "the paragon of beauty" while the male one is perceived as the most powerful, destructive and turbulent river. Its waters are "opaque with mud" and carry "a heavy load of leaves, twigs, and broken branches" while its banks are littered with "silt, a thick, muddy ooze" (p.3).

*Nsu Ber*, on the other hand, is idealized as follows:

Its waters were extraordinarily clear. You could see all the way down to the bed of fine sand sprinkled with pebbles of many colours, from light yellows to deep, dark purples ... Along the clear river's right bank the fine yellow sand brought by this stream formed a narrow strand ... it was such a clear thing of beauty, people named it *Nsu Ber*, the female river. (p.3)

The text self-consciously extends the theme of the antithesis of life and death, destruction and re-creation, by showing how the greatly different rivers create an unusually fertile and beautiful patch of land which is sandwiched between the male and female rivers, *Nsu Nyin* and *Nsu Ber*:

Between the female river and the male, below Esuano, lay a wide strip of land cut off as if deliberately from the surrounding land. No one farmed it, though it was fertile, being river soil. A soft mat of grass covered it. It was entirely green, except that at intervals the green was broken by a flower, watery blue, bright yellow, or pale purple, raised a hand's height above the grass on a slender, quivering stalk. The grass was gentle, extremely gentle. Underneath it the soil was soft but firm, and the whole wide strip of land was innocent of thorns. (pp.3-4)

There is a concealed but insistent vision at work in this novel – a pervasive vision which reassembles and re-orders a new society from the wreckage triggered by devastating kingship

rituals. This overt reassemblment and re-integration of the fragmented chaos of the Akan world view – a rebirth which is absent from *Two Thousand Seasons* – emerges as the most fundamental difference between the two novelistic histories. This muted re-generation or re-creation appears to be slowly transmogrifying the debris of centuries of destruction wrought by god-like despotic kings of Africa and their inheritors, the contemporary political leaders, into a new world order – a rebirth. Densu's spiritual rebirth, the putting together of the fragmented physical and spiritual beings of Araba Jesiwa and Asamoa Nkwanta confirm this critical perception. It is obvious that the inner textual dynamic of the novel is engaged in an ongoing process of reassembling all the splintered pieces of lives wrecked during the course of its coming into being into organic wholes – a view which Awoonor lucidly conveys as follows:

Shocks, surprises, dislocations into irregularities, basic splinterings, and mercurial transmogrifications are only the inner dynamics of the total process. Everything is irreducible because everything is important. The process therefore encloses self-generated ecstasy, ritual abandon, moments of madness, the shattering of the formalities of the so-called perceived reality. (1973:91).

The shattered legs of Araba Jesiwa are reassembled, her muteness negated, and her loss of a son assuaged with the regaining of a spiritual son, Densu. The traumatised Asamoa Nkwanta is also physically and emotionally healed and the loss of his nephew somehow relieved with a spiritual replacement, Densu. The most overt textual actualization of this regeneration is Araba Jesiwa's reassembling of her fragmented pieces: the legs broken in three by the obscene strength of Buntui and her loss of ability to speak are reintegrated into one whole being. Y. S. Bofo conveys this view when he says in his "The Nature of Healing in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*" that "Damfo's treatment of Araba Jesiwa's almost irreparably broken bones is a masterpiece of traditional healing. It is a medical moulding of fragments into a single whole, that is what healing is about" (1986:99).

But what is important is not Damfo's mastery of healing but the fact that the re-integrated being of Araba Jesiwa mirrors other facets of regeneration within the Akan world. It mirrors the muted hope ritualized at the close of the novel. Both Ababio and Esuman have paid for their crimes and Densu has the loss of his parents at a tender age symbolically reversed. Araba Jesiwa and Nkwanta have become his spiritual parents. Densu, again, functions here as a mythical bridge



generating another trinity: the Nkwanta-Densu-Jesiwa triumvirate. The novel appears to be manipulating two conflicting discourses. At an overt level, the iconoclastic narrator divests all the Akan legendary heroes, particularly the Asantehenes, of their false glory. But beneath this brazen disfigurement of the traditional African legendary heroism lurks an attempt to exhume, purify and reassemble what are considered as communal myths devoid of tyrannical god-like kings' ideologically-manufactured ritual/mythic pollutants. Thus, like *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* re-creates a new Akan world order from the debris of its dismantled despotic warrior-kingship rituals. The marvellous seduction generated by the celebratory manifestations of the text tends to convey an illusory romanticized image of traditional African heritage. It is crucial to point out the difference between *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* here. Although *The Healers* succeeds in re-creating a new world order from the mutilated debris of the Akan world, *Two Thousand Seasons* fails in its attempt to replace the demolished glorious past with "the Way".

But the narrator does not allow the reader to be lured by the re-generative and the re-creative potentials of this brutalized and divided world. The slow and painful recovery and the "true" emancipation of *Abibiman*, as Anoa predicts in *Two Thousand Seasons*, will take "two thousand seasons". Thus the muted hope which is projected by Ama Nkroma – the Pan-Africanist dream of one unified continent, which closes *The Healers* – is only an echo of the apocalyptic vision symbolized by Anoa's prophecy. This illusion is quickly dispelled when the omniscient narrator takes down, piece by piece, the thick ancient walls of cabalistic spell (e.g. the conjuring of the Golden Stool from the sky), wrought by Okomfo Anokye, and makes it possible for the reader to gaze at the unprecedented horrors which Densu tells us are so abominable that their foulness and diabolical nature are "fit to wake ancestral corpses from the sleep of ages" (p.160). *The Healers* re-asserts and sustains the rejection of African hereditary rule initiated by *Two Thousand Seasons*. It is crucial to point out here that while Armah exploits direct satirical hammer blows in his iconoclastic onslaught against the respected heads of the Akan chiefs in *Two Thousand Seasons*, he adopts the historical mode of searchlight which prises open the rooted and degraded secrets of centuries of fouled Akan ethnohistorical pollution for our inspection.

The foregoing discussions which amount to a repudiation of kingship in Africa are amplified by a defiant and radical dismissal of African royalty. Damfo, the guru of the healers, tells Densu that

the healers "see royalty as a disease affecting the people". "Royal power", we are told, "grows from contempt ... It comes from abuse of human beings and things" (p.94). The most overt castigation of Africa's hereditary rule is conveyed in a dialogue between Damfo and Asamoa Nkwanta, the general of the Asante army, whose nephew's ritual murder by the Asante Royal House shatters him physically, mentally and spiritually. The famous general spiritually reduced into a babbling baby by the slave kingdom of Asante – a heinous maltreatment which exposes the soft and slimy underbelly of the Asante Empire's fouled history – becomes a classic index of Asante autocracy and culture of violence. Discussing the ideal world with Damfo, Asamoa Nkwanta asks:

"What kind of world would it be then? A world without slaves?"

"Precisely," said Damfo, calmly. "A world without slaves."

.....  
"A world without slaves! You might as well wish for a world without kings."

.....  
"Yes, no slaves, no kings."

... "You think impossible thoughts, healer. Our people have always had kings and slaves."

"Not always," Damfo said. (p. 175)

The creative purpose of the novel's exploitation of the Nkwanta/Asante plot is to show the all-consuming nature of the villainy of kingship. Its culture of violence is so thoroughly corrupt that no human value is worth a mouse-skin. Prince Appia was an heir to the Esuano stool but he was killed by Ababio, who has now imposed himself upon the people of Esuano as king because he stood in the way of the latter's royal aspirations. Asamoa Nkwanta is the soul of the Asante army but that does not prevent Prince Boache Aso from deliberately killing the general's nephew. Damfo reveals the thrust of the novel when he says Asamoa Nkwanta "was treated like a slave" and that this "shattered him" (p.97). The coda to the text's thesis, which is thus underscored by Damfo, is: "If the worth of a man depended on his deeds and not on his birth, Asamoa Nkwanta would easily have been the most important man in the whole land" (p.98). Damfo reaffirms this chronic disintegrating propensity of kingship as follows: "... to the royals the healing of the black people would be disaster, since kings and chiefs suck their power from the divisions between our people" (p.269).

The theme of kingship as a system of government in which the visionless, parasitic and mediocre govern the visionaries and the productive, initiated in *Two Thousand Seasons*, is elaborated upon in *The Healers*. It is suggested that the worm of moral decay which subverts Africa is linked to kingship and its rotten rituals, particularly its institutionalization of slavery. The thrust of the work is that the chiefs constitute the richest sustenance for the destructive growth of slavery. What emerges from the above conversation between Asamoa Nkwanta and Damfo is how tyrannical and immoral the measures are created by the chiefs. It also reveals how rotten, disused, unethical rituals are exhumed by traditional rulers for their own selfish ends. These are ideologically disguised and mystified as pristine ancient customs, designed by the first progenitors (like Okomfo Anokye) of the race for the communal wholeness of *Abibiman* and handed down from generation to generation.

Intent upon vilifying the Akan kings for institutionalizing slavery in pre-colonial Africa, Armah dramatizes the profaned, mystified, ancient kinship between slaves and kings. Thus the exchange between the prisoner, Densu, and King Ababio highlights a crucial issue: who begets the other, the slave or the king? The lecture on the genealogical history of slavery and chieftaincy, brilliantly delivered by the inordinately power-drunk Ababio, goes to the heart of the matter when he talks about the rise of his slave grandfather to royal favour and power:

Every royal family is also a slave family. The two go together. You don't get kings without slaves. You don't get slaves without kings. My family has been a part of this – at first the lower part, the slave part.

... he [Ababio's grandfather] did not make the mistake of wasting his eloquence in honest talk. He used his tongue profitably, only for flattering the powerful. ... Once, my father told me, this my grandfather lay down in front of the king, in public, and shouted:

"Spit into my mouth, O King, so a little of your infinite wisdom may pass onto me!"

"The king accepted the invitation. He spat. His aim must have been excellent. The spittle fell into my grandfather's mouth, all of it. And my grandfather swallowed it. To his eternal credit and to the immediate profit of his descendants, he didn't retch. The knowledge is in the spirit my grandfather passed down mixed with the blood of our mothers [sic] ... After that heroic swallowing of the king's spittle, it didn't take long before it became impossible for anyone to see the king without first being forced to pass my grandfather's scrutiny." (pp.300-301)<sup>4</sup>

Ababio recounts his slave genealogy proudly, and with a superb syllogism proves that the quickest

road to power is "blind loyalty to those who already have the greatest power" (p.300 ), namely the Europeans of Cape Coast. He concludes his illuminating lecture with an illustration of his slave grandfather's rise to power. Ababio's unquestionably genuine pride in his grandfather's repulsive bootlicking behaviour accounts for the healers' conviction that slave mentality is nourished by kingship – a political culture exemplified in contemporary Africa where political leaders, cloaked in bombastic praise names, are hero-worshipped by the fawning masses who treat them as demigods. Thus, with pride and defiance, Ababio boasts to Densu about his legendary grandfather as follows:

Look at me now and tell me. Have I betrayed his dreams? Or have I been a worthy successor to him? Who now ever thinks of calling Ababio a slave? Ababio is royal. Ababio is a king. (p. 301)

Ababio kills the heir to the stool and attempts to kill his ward so as to emulate his grandfather's climb up the political ladder. The satanic greed for power – the beast in man, which sometimes turns whole African tribes into refugees – is thus shown to have its origins in Africa's glorious Age. As an immediate reward for Ababio's grandfather's "unrivalled legendary heroism", the Asantehene gives him away "as a gift" to "a white man" who does not need him and so in turn gives him away "again as a gift to the then king" of Esuano. In his "Asante Military Institutions" (1980) Arhin asserts that in historical Asante, those who performed acts of exemplary heroism were sometimes given large tracts of land populated with people as gifts (Arhin, 1980:25). The maze of sacrificial lambs or ritual carriers which crowd this work appear to parody this ancient Akan self-sacrifice, which the text both criticizes and celebrates. In Ababio's grandfather's case the reverse happens. The dehumanized act is perceived as an honour by the fawning slave who is given as a gift to a white man.

Like *Two Thousand Seasons* whose main preoccupation is to divest the Akan Kings and Africa's legendary historical figures of their false glory, the central concern of *The Healers* is to parody and to ridicule the legendary martial ferocity of the Asanteman – *a heroic tradition which is shown to have degenerated into the pathetic swallowing of the Asantehene's spittle*. The narrative technique of mock-legendary-heroism, exemplified by this incident, is one of the pervasive stylistic modes which permeates this novel. The offering of self for sacrifice to the gods

so that the Asante Empire could win military victories against enemies has become a national ideal through which a commoner can attain noble status. This view is historically confirmed by Arhin as follows:

An occupant of the Kumawu stool, Tweneboa Kodua, is said to have agreed to have himself sacrificed so that the Asante could defeat the Denkyera army. Consequently, his descendants are to this day accorded the privilege of freedom from execution by the sword. The name of Tweneboa Kodua is known to every Asante and he is revered as the archetypical Asante patriot. Of all the *abrempon*, the immediate subordinates of the Asantehene, the Adontehene alone never bows to or, removes his sandals when greeting the Asantehene when he sits in state, because an ancestor of the Adontehene was said to have sacrificed himself for an Asante victory. Even if the stories of Tweneboa Kodua and the Adontehene are legends, they emphasize the value of altruistic suicide, and also the weight attached to bravery to [sic] other Asante. (Arhin, 1980:25)

The novel transforms its oblique divestment of the hollow glory of traditional rulers into an undisguised caustic repudiation of the Fante kings who had had a long-established contact with Europeans since the first slave fort, the Elmina Castle, was built in 1481. The Asante Empire, on the other hand, effectively became a British Protectorate only in 1900, giving the Fante kings over four centuries of living under European colonial domination before the Asantes too began to experience alien oppression. The aim of the text in juxtaposing the two Akan rival kingdoms is, I think, to expose how the different political cultures of the two Akan kingdoms are affected by their two distinct historical experiences. The text persistently represents the Fante kings as a ruling class crippled by impotence and unlike the Asantehenes, are completely seduced by European ethos. The text initiates its denigration of the chiefs by humorously ridiculing them for their sexual frailty which is a symbolic index of the different levels of sterility which plague the Fante kingdom.

Accordingly, Densu introduces Damfo's famous sexual-potency-generated drug he has brought along to Nsaako, the spokesman for the King of Cape Coast, Nana Ata. The literal Fante meaning of the aphrodisiac drug, *Bediwona*, reveals its ribald parodist intent. The literal meaning of *Bediwona* is "you will copulate with your mother". Lurking beneath the sardonic humour and the profanity evoked by the name, is a virulent condemnatory undertone which suggests that the kings are corrupt and thoroughly debauched as a result of excessive fornication and that they are

politically powerless and need all kinds of bizarre cabalistic contrivances to keep the façade of their god-like omnipotent and legendary image. This ineffectualness is presented first through their sterile physical attributes. The narrator goes on to delineate the wormy relationship between the fawning Fante kings and the British colonizers.

The novel presents its portrayal of the Fante chiefs gathered to welcome Sir General Garnet Wolseley through Densu's point of view. We are told that "The loud competition of royal noises in the field was an echo of dizzying movements surging around the tents, centring on them". This suggests that the chiefs are jostling for the attention of Sir General Garnet Wolseley like beggars waiting for crumbs from the dinner table of the rich and powerful. This view is eloquently affirmed by the declaration that "In shape it was a procession much like a python freshly fed" (p.193). The denigration of the Akan dynastic traditions is intensified as follows:

The head and tail were slender, but the line spread out monstrosly in the middle around a large red umbrella with a gilt carved figure topping it. The sun hitting the golden figure came off in a sharp glare ... he saw below the manic red umbrella a wild crowd bulging at the sides. (pp.193-194)

This cheap golden imitation is Armah's self-conscious hurling of sneer at the Fante chiefs for their hollow aping of the Asante Empire's fabulous traditional display of gold and by extension, that of Africa's Golden Age as symbolized by Mansa Musa I of Mali's "golden pilgrimage". I must also hasten to add that gold is the symbol of royalty in Akan cosmology. The text suggests that the "gilt carved figure" is not actually made of solid gold. This presents Fante kingship as second rate compared to Asante kingship in terms of martial ferocity and splendour, imitating traditions which have lost their enduring pristine values, leaving only the trashy shell of the fabulous pre-colonial glory. The second Fante royal stool is ingeniously made to look more impressive. The royal stool is carved and "supported by a carved elephant whose feet stood firmly on the oblong base". In front of the stool is "the hide of a leopard with the head still attached, the yellow fangs bared fiercely even in death":

The king's feet, almost lost in a pair of enormous flat leather sandals, their upper thongs encrusted with intricate gilt designs, rested on the leopard skin. In front of the king, to one side of the skin, a young man sat crossed-legged, holding two ceremonial swords slanted across each other. Over the king's right shoulder stood

a grey-haired man with a black staff at the head of which a parrot with its beak open had been carved. (p.197)

The empty flamboyance of Fante kingship – the bombastic and futile attempts to recapture the mythical splendour of the ancient magical empires, symbolized by the Sudanic empires of fabulous gold – is being ridiculed by the text. The novel hints that just as the Fante kings have failed to restore the spell of the past and just as absurd imitations of the past cannot enhance royal dignity and grandeur, so the Asantehene Kofi Karikari and his notables will discover during the British invasion that no amount of bogus sacrifices of slaves and self-sacrificing nobles will recapture that magical Friday on which the Golden Stool was conjured from heaven by Okomfo Anokye. The myth of supernatural origins is about to be exploded by reality: internal divisions and invading British forces. This is reality which no priest can transcend by invoking the supernatural forces of ancestral spirits and gods.

*The Healers* renews its castigation of the image of traditional Africa by implying that the Fante chiefs have turned their sole attention to how to get material benefits from their European allies. This perception accounts for Glover's declaration: "Give a black man gifts ... and his soul belongs to you. He and his people will fight for you" (p.259). The most important gift, as far as the chiefs are concerned, is strong alcohol, an echo of King Koranche's addiction to hot spirits in *Two Thousand Seasons* – an addiction which accounts for his sale of the initiates into slavery. Thus, we are told that Glover "bought drinks to bribe the kings so that they would bring their men to fight for him" (p.259). *The Healers* also exposes the hypocrisy which clothes selfish British interests in humanitarian terms. This de-mythification is quickly effected by "the huge amount" of money Wolseley generously offers to pay each king every month. He also offers to give each warrior a free supply of food – an offer which is communicated to the Fante chiefs by Wolseley's interpreter as follows:

"The powerful white man will give the huge sum of ten English pounds, ten English pounds, let me say it again, ten English pounds, the white man's real money, the powerful white man will give this money every month to each king who brings a thousand warriors to Dunkwa.

... In addition there will be rice to the measure of one pint each day, and meat, delicious salted meat to the measure of one pound every four days, for every fighting man.

... The powerful Sir Garnet Wolseley, to ensure that everything goes well, will send one of his white men from among these you see here, to be with each king. That white man will be an adviser, and he must be obeyed, because his advice will be merely for our own good. Disobedience will be punished." (p.201-202)

The fact that "The enthusiasm that greeted the previous statement" is replaced by "a vague confused murmur" not only reveals that the Fante kings are somehow aware of their impotence and of British guile but that they are also cognizant of the fact that four centuries of European colonisation has reduced them to near-slaves whose protests are limited to muted grumbling. The chorus-like repetition of "ten English pounds" amplifies the cheapness of the Fante kings just as the Fante warrior is cheapened by the offer of a few pints of rice and ounces of nutrition-depleted salted meat. If we consider the ten English pounds in relation to one thousand warriors, it means, in money terms, each warrior is worth about three pence in pound sterling!

The novel reveals the inner rot of the kingdom through the carefully-structured image of Fante royalty and through the textual portraits of the individual kings. The kings are parasites who live on the labours of others in luxury and eternal pleasure. We are told that King Ata of Cape Coast is incapable of walking and prefers sitting in his palanquin and being carried:

The royal sandals, being flat and several times wider than the king's feet, made him walk slowly, with great difficulty, raising each knee high under his rich cloth ... So when the carriers brought the palanquin he sank into its softness, a gratified look spreading over his face. The four men lifted the palanquin on their shoulders, each taking one corner with its jutting pole. The horns began the praises of the king, and the drums took them up in turn. The red umbrella was lifted again. (pp.203-204)

The carrying of the king in a palanquin on the shoulders of four men rekindles the symbolic referent of the parasitism of kingship and why the novel rejects it as an alien import. The body politic which turns some into slaves to provide for the eternal comfort of others who claim superiority through birth, the novel intimates, is immoral and generates politically-motivated violence. The physical description of the chiefs and the evocation of the image of "softness" (eclectically and elaborately exploited in *Two Thousand Seasons*) also reveals their jolting for power. The most illuminating portrayal is that of the king of Denkyera, Nana Kwesi Kyei, whose kingdom was once the most powerful before the rise of the Asante and is now conquered and



absorbed into the Asante Empire. The novel's presentation of a king without a kingdom to rule – a king whose past glory has been reduced to nothing but the empty crown he wears – projects the hollow status of all the Fante kings, whose political power is usurped by the British, and anticipates the fall of the Asante, who naïvely feel their "magic" (p.216) will last for ever. King Kwesi Kyei's physical description exposes his royal decline and the absurdity of his carrying on the empty royal sham of self-deification. He is contemptuously depicted as "a strange-looking man, who walked unsteadily, like a toddler". Using Densu as the focalizer, the novel unveils the pathetic figure of the once legendary king of Denkyera:

He had a ludicrous-looking crown, a small shell cone which sat insufficiently on top of his head. It was gilded, but the sunshine only made it seem even more undignified. It was not age that made him so shaky on his feet, however, because he did not look old. Certainly he was nowhere near the spokesman's age. (p.205)

We are told that "... Densu glimpsed the cause of this king's instability: his eyes were red as daylight blood, with the kind of redness lent by hot spirits too freely drunk" (p.205). This suggests that the kings normally bury their impotence in hot spirits, freely supplied by the Europeans who find them pliable in their drunkenness. The portrait of King Tsibu of Assen, who is said to have "glistening hair and skin of such smoothness it was hard to think of him as a grown man and not a large pampered baby" (p.295), underlines the theme of the image of "softness", "smoothness" and "fatness" which permeates Armah's novels, evoking the parasitism of the African ruling élite which enjoys an opulent lifestyle which originates from the ancient kingship grounded on eternal indolence. The symbol of "smoothness" represents the kings as huge maggots which do nothing but eat. The work's treatment of this topic confirms the thesis that this novel is a natural continuation of *Two Thousand Seasons*, which deals with the same subject in greater detail. The Fante addiction to aping European culture is also deployed by the text in its disfigurement of the Fante kingdom. That the king of Dominase is called King Solomon, and the fact that the king of Gomoa also calls himself "Mr Bentil, Field Marshal", instead of his traditional name, Opanyin Bentsir, echoes the white-washing of African names initiated in *The Beautiful Ones* and elaborated upon in *Two Thousand Seasons* when Prince Bentum renames himself Bradford George.

The climax of the text's vilification of the image of the Fante kingdom is its depiction of the

meeting of the decision-making body of the kingdom, the Council of the Fante Confederation, constituted by Fante chiefs, who used the British presence at the coast to ward off Asante imperial aggression. The text shifts into the mock-heroic mode in order to intensify its repudiation of kingship. The aim of the meeting of the Fante chiefs, *The Healers* contends, is to divide "the spoils of war" – the one hundred and forty-four bottles of hot spirits Wolseley brings to bribe the Fante chiefs, who will do anything to get alcoholic drinks. The mock-heroic battle is initiated by Nana Kwesi Kyei of Denkyera, whose attempt to grab the spoils ends in abysmal failure, bringing "the whole box [of liquor] crashing down on top of himself" (p.206). When Buntui, the giant without brains, finally opens the case of drinks, the narrator tells us that "the laughter of the royals became first a gasp, then a lively conversation about what kind of drink the bottles might contain". And this initiates another ritual – the liturgical fetishization of European education epitomized by the Fante interpreter. Thus, "the interpreter, with an air of great wisdom, studied the writing on the bottle's white label, turned the bottle round, searched for further inscriptions, returned to the label, stared at the words again, and shaped his mouth to pronounce the liquor's name" (p.207). But before he could read it out to his audience, the "legendary-alcoholic" Denkyera king, Kwesi Kyei's expert tongue discovers the right name and shouts with joy : "Gin ... And strong!". Thus the Denkyera king lives up to his old legendary image by being the mock-heroic victor!

But here the text reflexively negates its proclaimed cultural hegemonism with a startling counter-hegemonic discourse cloaked in a double-talking trope. The author of the double-voiced signification is the drunken King of the Denkyera, who is not even aware of his heroic achievement. The sneer, unwittingly hurled against the aping interpreter who is fastidiously invoking the magical world of British literate culture is the text's postulate that only the tongue is required here. What the sycophantic British-indoctrinated Black interpreter is trying unconsciously to effect is to "rewrite Europe on the colony" (Baucom: 1991:8) – a subconscious attempt that is subconsciously annihilated by the drunken Denkyera king. This both subverts and subtly unveils the irrelevance of British colonial education in the affairs of the Akan kings.

The double-sidedness of this literary device is revealed by its invocation of the anti-heroic. Since Nana Kwesi Kyei makes his great "alcoholic discovery" like a legendary colonialist explorer by sucking desperately from a broken bottle "like a famished baby at a mother's breast" his next shout

is "I am wounded, brothers ..." (p.207). This inventive artifice projects the whole pathetic episode as a mock-heroic façade. This view is reinforced when the reader is told that "The motion dislodged his [Nana Kwesi Kyei's] crown. The fragile shell hit the ground with a crack, and rolled unevenly towards the door" (p.208). This statement conveys not only the inherent absurdity and emptiness of the Denkyera king, who has no kingdom to govern, but also the precariousness of all the Fante kings, whose political authority is as decrepit as the shell crown of King Kwesi Kyei of Denkyera. The vision projected here also portends the fall of the Asante empire, which the novel treats towards the end of the narrative. As if this ingenious self-conscious narrative patterning were not enough, the narrator tells us that King Amoonu, the friend of the Denkyera king, "scooped the wayward crown in mid-stride, crossed the room ... and ... replaced the crushed crown on Nana Kwesi Kyei's head". The deep symbolic meaning unveiled by this sentence is the fact that all the royal crowns of the Akans, Asante included, will soon become "ungovernable" as the British Crown takes over the whole of the Gold Coast.

Then comes the coda – the climax of the August meeting of the Fante Confederation Council – "Let's count the bottles, and divide them equally" (p.208). The text's satirical aim is revealed in the fact that this suggestion which is made by Chief Robertson, who has already lost his Akan name and is dressed in European clothes. The intended sardonic humour and the caricature are generated by the fact that the suggestion is rejected by the "inverted-legendary" King Kwesi Kyei of Denkyera, who asserts that "we are all kings, but there are kings among kings" (p.208). This not only evokes the divisiveness of the world portrayed by this novel, but it also reveals that the king without a kingdom forgets he is only a shadow of a king. After a heated debate and much wrangling "the spoils of war" are divided, King Edu of Mankesim taking the lion's share of twenty bottles. The Fante kings, the text maintains, are nothing more than "mimic chiefs", to parody the title of V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), desperately and futilely re-living "the good old days" of Africa's Golden Age.

The text's manipulation of human external features as an index of the inner attributes is extended to cover all characters perceived to be morally tainted one way or the other. The most graphic evidence of this creative ploy is the narrator's depiction of Ababio after he has become the king of Esuano while Densu was away in Asante with Asamoa Nkwanta, the Asante general, healed

by Damfo. On his return to Esuano, Densu is surprised to discover that kingship has physically transformed Ababio:

Ababio lay comfortably sprawled on a great brass bed under a canopy of red silk. *He looked fatter; his skin looked oilier*, and somehow he seemed to have grown balder, though that should have been impossible. A large mirror stood at the foot of the bed. Several torches burned in the room. When the mute giant presented Densu, Ababio stared at him. (pp.298-299)

The reference to Ababio's fatness and oiliness, simply because he has become the king of Esuano during the brief period Densu was away, unequivocally sanctions the text's vision of kingship as a kind of bloated and obscene parasitic worm. Armah's use of physical appearance to create an image of moral repulsiveness is also evident in his portrayal of the Asante Queen Mother, Efua Kobri, as a parasite. This is how the narrator relates her entry into the secret war council attended by Asamoa Nkwanta, after which she sabotages the latter's plan for luring the invading British forces into the forest where they could be easily beaten:

The last to enter the council hall was the queen mother herself, Efua Kobri. She, the elegant brown one, came wearing silk robes as usual, *her skin soft as baby's*. Seven female attendants followed her – she was travelling light today. The last of her train were three fat men – eunuchs. Among the three Densu recognized one form as surely as if he had seen Oson in broad daylight before. (p.239)

The inner moral rot of the queen mother is revealed by her monstrous betrayal of the Asante people and the text's defamiliarized portrayal of her physical attributes. The softness and the smoothness of the Asante Queen Mother's skin, depicting her as a perfect symbol of royal opulence and parasitic lifestyle, represent her inordinate selfishness, which leads her to advise the Asante Royal House to abandon Kumase, the Asante capital, so that the British could occupy it without a fight – a diabolical treachery designed to prevent Asamoa Nkwanta from achieving military victory and fame. The reference to her softness, her brown skin and her being accompanied by three fat eunuchs unleashes a number of insights. Her moral rot is evoked by the parasitic-looking oiliness of her body and the three eunuchs who attend to her selfish needs while her brown skin colour instead of the desirable black pigmentation echoes the novel's repulsive portrayal of Buntui at the beginning of the novel. The brownish-skin colour of the obscene monstrous-looking giant, Kwao Buntui, Ababio's hired assassin, is described as follows:

His skin had a reddish colour, not a smooth red but a sort of unfinished-looking red. This made him look some-what like a clay pot prematurely snatched out of the kiln that should have fired and darkened it. Two things stood out about this one: his ugliness and size. (p.9)

In order to negate the European racist superiority enshrined in white skin pigmentation, Armah initiates a marvellous act of de-mythification in which he exploits the myth which perceives man as having been moulded from clay and having been fired in the kiln. This myth of man's origins, to draw on Tutu's essay (1972:16), is akin to the Red Indian myth of man's genesis. The original didacticism of this myth describes how the black man was forgotten by the Supreme Creator in the oven of creation, hence his burnt black skin. The Fante fascination with the European ethos, which is epitomized by the Fante obsession with Anglicizing their surnames and using skin-lightening creams to white-wash their skins, accounts for Armah's deflation of the craze to look like Europeans. The text achieves its subversion of white-skinned supremacy by juxtaposing a light-skinned African with a dark-skinned one. This theme is elaborately treated in *Fragments* when Armah satirizes Ghanaian women for using skin-lightening cream called *Ambi-Extra* and when he lampoons the Ghanaian civil servants for Anglicizing their surnames in *The Beautiful Ones*. Let us take a look at Armah's glorified portrait of the dark-skinned African and the revolting picture of the reddish-looking Buntui:

The fellow [Densu] to his right was tall and handsome. His body was economically built, almost thin. His skin was smooth and black. His head was large. It had a bold, prominent forehead from whose gentle curve sunlight bounced as from a polished surface. He had his eyes half-closed against the morning light, though the sun was behind him ... [his eyes] had a beauty that came from a certain liquid clarity .... (p. 8)

He [Buntui] was light-skinned. His skin had a reddish colour, not smooth red but a sort of unfinished-looking red. This made him look somewhat like a clay pot prematurely snatched out of the kiln that should have fired and darkened it. Two things stood out about this one: his ugliness and his size. He was huge. (p. 9)

The symbol of black superiority and perfection, conveyed by the fictional histories, is the unsullied blackness of the black character as evoked by the African American aphorism, "black is beautiful". Thus, the novel spurns, rather wittily, blacks who think that they are better than their kith and kin simply because they are light-skinned and not pitch black, ultimately scoffing at the source of their

naïve skin-colour prejudice: the European. Black militant intellectuals, this author included, advocate, particularly during the heydays of African Personality and “Black is beautiful”, that no human being should be relegated to the lower chain of the human species because of skin colour.

Africa's cycle of disintegration, which is the thrust of this novel, is seen to be caused by the inherent ideology of kingship which is structured around the tribe. This view is powerfully confirmed when the healers try to stop the Fantes from serving as porters for the British forces about to invade the Asante:

"Only one great difficulty faces us. At times the carriers agree with us, but say the choice is between being slaves of the Asante kings and being slaves of the whites. Then we can't give them the answer we would like to give, because we healers also see what they see: the royals of Asante do not wish the unity of black people all over this land. All they know is Asanteman. Of Ebibirman [*Abibiman*] they are totally ignorant. Wilfully so. That is the sad thing." (pp.267-268)

Damfo's view of kingship as basically a tribal structure is borne out by the Asante imperial history. The mythical origins of the Asante Union began with the seven chiefs of the divisional states – Kumase, Mampong, Kokofu, Bekwai, Dwaben, Asumegya and Nsuta. But from the very beginning the principle of *equality* was subverted: only the Kumasihene, who was also the head of the Asante Union and is called the Asantehene, was allowed to make a stool for himself from gold; the other six chiefs could only sit on silver stools (J.K. Fynn, 1971:20; A. Kyerematen, 1969:3).

Like *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* exposes the dehumanization of women in order to effect its repudiation of hereditary rule in Africa. Araba Jesiwa's agony is tethered to the cycle of suffering that Mother Africa has been subjected to since time immemorial. To drive home the evil cycle of existential and historical emptiness which wrecks this world, *The Healers* deploys the *abiku* motif: the endless cycle of conception, birth, and early death and rebirth. Abena's ritual dance which evokes only the nascent form of the symbolic cycle of *abiku* – the initiation dance, the capture and the final shackling of the initiates within the murky womb of the slave ship in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the escape and the return to Anoa only to find that slavery is re-established – has now matured into a full-blown evil cycle of *abikus* which torments Araba Jesiwa in *The*

*Healers*. The novel introduces the endless cycle of the void generated by *abiku* with a pattern of repetition woven around Jesiwa's name, evoking the chant-like narrative mode which structures the novel:

To the boy Densu, Araba Jesiwa talked freely, as if he were to her already an adult

.....  
She talked to him of anxiety – the terror clutching at a woman's entrails ....

She talked to him of the pain, of the fear of barrenness ....

She talked to him of waste ....

Araba Jesiwa loved to talk to him of hope ....

She talked to him of change ....

She talked to him of renewal ....

Araba Jesiwa talked to Densu of conception ....

She talked to him of fear ....

And she talked to him of that indescribable bursting out of joy which had made her laugh when she felt the actual pain of childbirth.

Araba Jesiwa talked of the pride of a mother.

She talked of the fear that continued in spite of joy ....

She talked of fullness ....

And she talked of gratitude .... (pp.67-68)

Araba Jesiwa's loading of her agonized cycle of *abikus* onto Densu, who was only a boy at this point in time, reveals two crucial insights. Firstly it unveils the long mysterious bond between the motherless and fatherless Densu and his prospective spiritual mother. This, revealing her innermost and tormented soul and mind, amounts to an act of ritual transfer of her burden of *abikus* to Densu, her future spiritual son and the supreme ritual carrier. This long mystic relationship between Araba Jesiwa and the boy confirms my interpretation of Densu as a carrier motif who symbolically bears all the physical, moral and spiritual burdens of the Gold Coast.

The self-referential stylistic mode manipulated by the *abiku* narrative also invokes an oppressive feeling of timeless cycles of hope of procreation only to be crushed mercilessly. This vision of the bottomless illusions of human striving conveyed by the incessant foregrounding of "she", "Araba Jesiwa" and "talked", creates, shatters and re-creates human dreams which are finally dispelled again, conveying the unending repetitiousness of the cycle of *abiku*: conception, birth, early death and re-conception, rebirth and another early death. The novel hammers home the remorseless wheel of futility and yawning emptiness which plague Araba Jesiwa through this chorus-like narrative patterning. Araba Jesiwa suffers four nightmares of miscarriages:

For years it had seemed Araba Jesiwa was fated to die childless. It was not conception she did not conceive. At least four times she welcomed man-seed in her womb and gave it space to grow into new life. Every time she had held the seed inside her with anxious care and a heartbreaking abundance of hope. But every time the new spirit she sought to welcome had refused flesh. The spirit had fled the world untried, and the abortion had turned the full hope in the would-be mother's eyes to vain water, impotently flowing.

Jesiwa sought help from a veritable procession of doctors promising cures. They stuffed her stomach with scrapings from the barks of innumerable trees. They fed her scratchings from snakes, rhinos, lizards, spiders, and scorpions, a most impressive array of beasts. Each doctor promised with his concoctions to give Araba Jesiwa the key that would unlock her love-gift and open her to fruitful life. (pp.69-70)

The countless number of bogus healers she has to see and the catalogue of the nauseating worthless concoctions she is doomed to drink and the fact that all these lead to nothing replays the evil cycle of *abiku* which eternally torments her. The paradox of life enigmatized by the novel is the sinister cycle of the agonizing reversals which inform human existence and history. Araba Jesiwa goes through a living hell in order to have a child. But as fate would have it, at the close of the novel she, like her namesake Araba in *Fragments*, again becomes childless when Ababio's assassin murders her only son, Prince Appia. The mutilation of Appia's corpse by Ababio, unwittingly, also resonates the traditional ritual of mutilating the corpse of an *abiku* child so that it does not continue its demonic cycle of tormenting its mother by re-entering the womb to be reborn, only to die again. Araba Jesiwa's rites of passage open on a vicious cycle of childlessness and close with the same repetitive cavernous feeling of barrenness. Her unending sufferings are presented as a mirror image of Akan society's timeless tribulations and by extension those of Africa.

Africa, like Araba Jesiwa, is portrayed by the text as a mother with a diseased womb, doomed to suffer an endless cycle of conceptions, miscarriages, and infant mortalities, and the premature deaths of her youths. Araba Jesiwa's rite of passage presages the futile attempts by the Asante Empire to halt its inevitable demise by resorting to the ancient ineffectual African mystical arts which Okomfo Anokye used to bamboozle and mystify the six Akan divisional states, the original pawns in this political game of mystical chicanery, into surrendering their independence and becoming members of the Asante Union. But the ancient magic is now irredeemably tainted and



can no longer hold the fragmented empire together. In *The Beautiful Ones*, however, the ancient decay and rust hold together the dilapidated symbolic bus of Ghana from falling apart. My next concern is Armah's castigation of the British colonizing mission in the Gold Coast and his re-interpretation of Asante history.

To achieve this didactic aim Armah isolates the British General Sir Garnet Wolseley, who claims to be the conqueror of the Asante Empire, for the disinvestment of his false military glory by offering an indigenised version of the fall of the Asante Empire – a re-Africanised historical account which argues that what Sir Garnet and his soldiers conquered was only the mummified remains of a dead empire. The text's vicious deflation of "the British legendary hero", Sir General Garnet Wolseley, is appropriately evoked on his entry into Kumase, "the never-violated city", (p.288) as follows:

Throughout the streets of the town, loose crowds flowed slowly, aimlessly about. It was as if they had all come out of their houses to await some extraordinary event. The extraordinary event was the entry of the white invaders into Kumase, the never-violated city. As the sun dipped down in the west the *white general Wolseley came riding -- the cripple -- on an ass* surrounded by his officers and red, sweating soldiers. (p.288, my emphasis)

The European victory over Asante is somehow devalued when the conqueror who deserves heroic glory is contemptuously dismissed by the text as a "cripple on an ass". This satirical trope conveys the novel's exposure of Sir Garnet Wolseley's empty military grandeur. The military act is not aimed at territorial conquest but at the economic plunder of Asante's rich mineral resources, particularly gold. Wolseley's racial arrogance and self-grandeur is further dented when the novel reveals that "He was not a tall man, but the way he held himself he gave the impression of wishing the world to take him for a giant, straining to scrape the sky itself with his forehead" (p.200). Self-deification, the text implies, is the general failing of all power-and-glory-hungry megalomaniacs, be they black or white.

This leads us naturally to Armah's canny visionary reconstruction of the collapse of the Asante Empire. There is a critical perception that *The Healers* rejects the Eurocentric version of Asante history and endorses the recent Afrocentric interpretation which presents the Asante as a historical

dinosaur shattered by superior European military hardware.<sup>5</sup> Such an interpretation is only a superficial account of the novel's historical construct of the fall of Asante Empire. Armah's novel in fact not only dismisses the Eurocentric distorted version of Asante history but it also rejects the Afrocentric version and offers its own independent account of Asante history. The monarchical origins of the Asante Empire – the epitome of Akan legendary kingship – is perceived to be flawed from birth, accounting for its fouled history and its inevitable fall. It is obvious that *The Healers*, to borrow from Homi K. Bhabha's article, "The other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", self-consciously turns its back on the Western interpretation of African history and historiography. This stylistic strategy enables Armah to move away from the imperialistic hegemonic centre to the colonized "otherness" (Bhabha, 1985:149).

The corollary to this European version of African history and historiography is the view that the only history Africa has is the records of European activities in Africa, a racist myth which is evoked by the Oxford University professor of history, Hugh R. Trevor-Roper's scandalous pontification on African history in his work, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (1965). Professor Trevor-Roper scornfully dismisses African history as "the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe" and asserts arrogantly that "there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history..." (Trevor-Roper, 1965:9). It is this distorted and racist European myth about African history that *The Healers* sets out deflate and de-mythologize.

To unveil what the novel perceives as the inherent flaw of the mythical and the historical foundation of the Asante Union by Okomfo Anokye and Osei Tutu, it is necessary to present a bird's eye view of the Asante Empire from the reign of Asantehene Kofi Karikari (1867-1874) to 1896 when Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I was exiled to the Seychelles and Asante lost its imperial power and became a British Protectorate after seventy-three years (1823-1896) of protracted military conflicts with the British colonial power (J.K. Fynn, 1971:19, in Michael Crowder, ed.). The "British expeditionary force under Sir Garnet Wolseley entered Kumase and burnt it down in 1874 ..." because the Asantehene Kofi Karikari, who refused to comply with the

British demand to surrender the entire Asante Royal Family as captives to the British, escaped together with the royal notables, leaving the palace and Kumase deserted and unprotected. Later, Kyerematen asserts, "Kofi Karikari was persuaded by his elders to abdicate" (Kyerematen, 1969:9). Kyerematen, an Asante historian, does not tell us why the Asantehene "was persuaded to abdicate". But J.K. Fynn, a Fante historian, demystifies the inexplicable "abdication." Fynn reveals that "Kofi Karikari himself was soon destooled for rifling the royal mausoleum" (1971:42). The wheel of chaos runs on. We are told that Asantehene Kofi Karikari "was succeeded by ... Nana Mensa Bonsu, who was forced to abdicate" in 1883 because of his immoral relationship "with the wives of some of his elders." Kyerematen's conclusions on Nana Mensa Bonsu's immorality ridicules the sexual frailty of the Asante Royal House when he declares that "The Ashanti clearly took a serious view of the sexual morals of their rulers, even though *Anokye* had decreed that a king might have a virtually unlimited number of properly married wives – 3,333 to be precise!" (Kyerematen, 1969:9). The iconic attribute of the number three is still prominent. But the magnitude of the size of the harem, recommended by one of Okomfo Anokye's mythical laws, makes this a suspect. It is more likely to be a matrimonial custom designed by sexually voracious Asantehenes long after the death of Okomfo Anokye, the ritual sacrificial carrier of Asante's immoral burdens. Nana Mensa Bonsu's successor, Kwaku Dua II died of small-pox after forty days of kingship. Kwaku Dua III (Agyeman Prempeh I) became Asantehene in 1888 after three years of chaotic interregnum, marked by violent contests for the Asante imperial crown.

At the height of this internal division, the British forces entered Kumase for the second time in 1896. This time Agyeman Prempeh I and the divisional chiefs, conscious of the 1874 defeat, offered no resistance. Thus, not a single shot was fired at the alien invaders. Asante was handed over to the British as if it were the private property of the Asantehene and the six divisional chiefs, because the Asantehene was more interested in retaining his royal status than in protecting his subjects. Fynn's account of the humiliating way in which the legendary Asantehene and the Queen-Mother servilely "kissed" the feet of the British officers in 1896 in their last ignominious attempt to retain their royal status – and not to save Asante – invokes more the spirit of Armah's text's historical reconstruction than the first British conquest and the burning of Kumase in 1874 during the reign of Asantehene Kofi Karikari, which forms the historical backdrop of Armah's novel:

The Asantehene received the column seated on a raised dias .... He wore a black crown heavily worked with gold, a silk robe and embroidered sandals. Gold and silver ornaments dangled from his wrists. Beside him sat the Queen-Mother, a composed attractive woman, surrounded by a retinue of brightly clad female attendants. The lower portions of the dias were occupied by other chiefs ....

The Governor [Sir William Maxwell] ... alleged that human sacrifices had taken place since the signing of the treaty and the indemnity had not been paid ... there was no need to depose Prempeh provided he now made his submission and paid 50,000 ounces of gold.

After waiting for a few minutes, clearly fighting his emotions, he and the Queen-Mother slipped off their sandals, walked across to where the British officers were sitting, prostrated themselves and embraced the feet of Maxwell and Scott. Then he declared that Asante was under the protection of the British Crown. (Fynn, 1971:45)

As Fynn argues, the British were not interested in the mere formal submission of the Asantehene. What they wanted were the gold mines and so the Asantehene, the Queen-Mother, the King's father, his two uncles, his brother, the two war-chiefs and the others were abducted and taken to Elmina Castle, then to Sierra Leone and finally to the Seychelles where they were exiled for twenty-eight years. In the last desperate attempt to save the Asante Kingdom, Yaa Asantewaa, the intrepid Queen-Mother of Edweso, led the last fierce and bitter war of resistance against the British in 1900, but was defeated and then exiled to the Seychelles to join Agyeman Prempeh I.

Armah links his denigration of the Asanteheñes, the pride of Akan heritage, to the historical origins of the Asante Empire, which, he maintains, is flawed by its very inception. If Armah had exploited the seventy-three years of the legendary heroic resistance of the Asante Empire against the British military attempts to conquer and to colonize it and in particular, the unparalleled legendary heroic role of the fearless Queen Mother, Yaa Asantewa, *The Healers* would have been more of an epic heroic celebration than a mock-anti-heroic narrative. But Armah chooses the period which coincides with the historic fall of the *famous kum* tree planted by the Asante Chief Magus-cum-Chief Priest, the legendary Okomfo Anokye. Armah centres his novel around this period in order to achieve his didactic purpose of eclectically manipulating a nativized myth-of-origins-oriented historical re-interpretation. The author's ultimate aim is to extract from this myth of origins a creative tool for exposing the fouled origins of the Asante Empire and re-inscribing the colonized otherness into the British imperialist hegemonic centre. Thus the novelist blends the mythical and the historical in such a way that the mythical and the pseudo-magico ritualization

of the myth of origins becomes the dominant narrative mode which informs and moulds the novel. This, it appears, accounts for the text's concentration on Asantehene Kofi Karikari whose reign witnesses the historic fall and the shattering of the sacred *kum tree* mystically planted by Okomfo Anokye during the founding of the Asante Union.

This historical accident appears to provide a perfect opportunity for the novel's eclectic deployment of the myth of origins which is linked to Okomfo Anokye and Osei Tutu. Fynn reports that on the day Asantehene Kofi Karikari wrote a reply to Sir Garnet Wolseley's letter of surrender and the payment of 50000 ounces of gold as war indemnity, the great ancient sacred *kum tree* which was "planted in Kumase by the famous Okomfo Anokye fell down" (Fynn, 1971:39, in Crowder, ed.). The fall of the sacred *kum tree* becomes a central symbol of *The Healers*. The text presents this accident as a portentous event auguring the fall of the Asante Empire. The impending fall of the Asante Empire leads to holocaustic chaos which allows the impotent and bogus priests to indulge themselves in diabolical human sacrifices.

The novel's exploitation of the spiritual and moral bankruptcy of the priests and the nobility as a physical index of the crumbling of the Asante Empire is ingeniously rehearsed during the dying moments of the legendary Asante Empire whose martial ferocity is enshrined in its ancient heroic aphorism: "Asante, wokum apem a apem baba" ("If you kill a thousand Asante warriors, a thousand more will replace the dead"). *The Healers* adopts a repetitive narrative mode to reinforce the shallowness of the absurd attempts to halt the impending dissolution of the decayed empire and to frighten off the advancing British army of invasion. The grovelling priests give the orders for countless human sacrifices to be made and insist that only "the youngest" and "the healthiest", "the strongest" and "the best" be sacrificed to the impotent gods:

"Do not kill only the weak, do not kill only the sick and the children!" the priests exclaimed. "The spirits deserve the youngest, the healthiest, the strongest sacrifices. Do not deny them the best offerings!"

The bodies of the victims were mutilated, not to please the spirits who only wanted their blood, the priests explained, but to frighten the advancing white soldiers into turning back, away from Kumase. The bodies were placed along the road, at every junction, at every great turning, to stop the white invaders.

*Still the white army pressed on towards Kumase. (p.282)*

That the unifying ancient magic which worked so well for Okomfo Anokye is both ineffectual and hideously corrupted is revealed by the fact that the endless human offerings made to the Akan gods, and the countless efforts made to halt the advancing British soldiers by frightening them with fiendishly mutilated human bodies, have achieved only the reverse. The futility of the endless cycle of attempts to thwart the British advance into Kumase is conveyed by a refrain which seals each futile endeavour: *"But still the white army pushed on towards Kumase"* (p.282). To initiate the monumental demise of the glorious Asante Empire reputed for its fabulous wealth of gold and invincible legendary military tradition, Armah manipulates the *ritually-cum-mythically-loaded kum tree* planted by Okomfo Anokye, the supreme Asante Chief Priest/Magus on that fateful Friday. Hence the collapse of Okomfo Anokye's sacred tree, the soul of the Asante Empire, is magnified through the self-reflexive narrative patterning of bizarre omens, foreshadowing the inevitable death of the Asante Empire.

The novel intimates that the unnatural cosmic disorder is a prelude to the impending chaos about to shatter the Asante Empire through an ingeniously-structured foregrounded narrative. We are told that "At the time when no rains were yet expected a bright day had suddenly been changed to menacing night" and "huge clouds had come to choke the air and fill the sky". The text manipulates self-conscious narrative techniques to hammer home Asante's impending doom. "Lightning flashes" are described as "fierce messengers of death looking for something to destroy", evoking both destructive supernatural forces and the advancing British forces armed with their powerful guns. The reader is then told that the storm destroys the bright day, turning it "into the night" (p.245), evoking Asante Empire's doom. Then comes the coda:

At midnight the clouds mumbled like an ill-tempered giant and then parted to precipitate on the astonished earth not rain, not water but a flood of hard stones. One was so large it crashed through a roof and broke the skull of a child six days old, dragging him back among his ancestors. (p.245)

The ritualistic crushing of the skull of the six-day-old baby signifies the disaster looming for Asante. It also heralds the cycle of military defeats Asante will suffer coupled with the massive carnage visited upon Asante soldiers (p.243 ). The natural calamity gives way to tragedy. The reader is told of how the Asante totemic porcupine, the fearless and invincible animal, is chased by "a huge silver python" right inside the royal mausoleum, the sacred burial place of Asante

kings, where it is caught and devoured like a harmless mouse:

The porcupine turned to face his hunter. His quills shot out, stiff, rattling fiercely against each other. But the python flowed just as smoothly forward. When he reached the porcupine, without first throwing his coils on him, without attempting to stretch his prey, he swallowed him whole – quills and all. Having fed, the python did not move on. He coiled himself in a pile of circles, and laid his head on the highest coil and began the sleep of days ... He lay a whole week undisturbed ... At the end of an exact week the python began to excrete, one after the other, porcupine quills to the number of thirty. That done, the serpent disappeared .... (pp.245-246)

The ease with which the python overpowers its prey and swallows it is the most eloquent symbolic deflation of Asante's legendary image. The ritual invocation of the variant of the iconic number *three* – the "*thirty*" quills excreted by the python – is a narrative device which is persistently manipulated by *The Healers*. This narrative technique of *defamiliarization* is designed to highlight the mythically- and iconographically-oriented re-interpretation of Asante history. The "pile of circles" suggests the endless deceptions the Asante royals and priests have manufactured in order to repair the inner cracks which permanently threaten the Asante Empire, which is paradoxically founded on the cabalistic spell originally cast by Okomfo Anokye. The third unnatural event is that a barren woman conceives and gives birth in her eleventh month "in exactly the blind middle of the night" to a child who talks like "an old man who had eaten barrels of pepper and salt as soon as he frees his head from his mother's womb" (p.246). This leads on to several other less significant omens culminating in the fall of the sacred *kum* tree.

This is the *ninth* and the final omen (a rehearsal of the iconic figure three), which is non-fictional and is reported by recorded history. The narrator's self-referential statement about the authenticity of the collapse of the *kum* tree reinforces my thesis that the novel's historicity is so impregnable that even events which look like creative inventions turn out to be syntheses of historical, ethnographical and mythical constructs of the Akan world order:

Even if all the stories of omens and portents reaching Kumase were false, what happened at Kumase itself, the capital city of Asanteman founded under the kum tree by the great priest Anokye and named by him, *what happened at Kumase was true* ... The kum tree, planted at the nation's birth, a tree supposed unshakable, huge giant of trees, the kum tree fell ... No disease of bark or branch or root had

given a single signal of impending decay. They [sic] great tree simply fell of a sudden. It was as if a hand, enormous yet unseen, had plucked it whole from the earth and dashed it in anger against the stones of the ground ... The great tree fell and was shattered into tiny pieces – a thousand and thirty fragments – as if whatever force had brought it down was not content to break it, but wanted to of this number pulverize it completely. (p.250)

The significance attached to the historic collapse and shattering of *the sacred kum tree* is evoked by the opening sentence of this citation. The narrator not only draws the reader's attention to the historical authenticity of this omen but he also subtly challenges critics who perceive fictional events as mere fantasies – a historical event confirmed by the Fante historian, Fynn (1971:39). To evoke the mythic mode, the novel rehearses the origins of the Asante Empire. Asante oral history relates that in order to decide on the capital of the newly created Asante Union, two *kum* trees were planted by the famous priest, Okomfo Anokye, in two places. One of the trees died and only a small town grew there. But where the *kum* tree survived, a huge town called Kumase grew, making it the capital of Asante. Armah does not relate the entire Asante myth of origins in which Okomfo Anokye (Anoché) magically conjured the Golden Stool from the sky on that portentous Friday and made the original members of the Asante Union swear the Great Oath of allegiance to it. The Golden Stool is traditionally called *Sika Dwa Kofi*, after the manner of an Akan child who is born on a Friday.

The allusion to Anoché (Anokye) and the *sacred kum tree* in the novel enigmatizes the mythical/magian origins. The shattering of the sacred old tree into one thousand and thirty pieces intimates that it has been drained of the juices of life, leaving it hard and brittle. The novel suggests that the ancient *kum tree* had come to be like an ancient monument rather than a living tree. It symbolizes a kingship that had stultified over the centuries and become a mere edifice waiting for the forces of nature to bring it down to earth. Hence, its fall sends shock waves through the nerve centres of the Asante Empire. We are told the Asantehene calls the priests, the representatives of Okomfo Anokye, and "charged them to tell the truth, even if the news was bad" (p.251). The fall and the shattering of the sacred tree into fragments and the summoning of the priests/witch-doctors/magicians re-enacts the Asante imperial genesis, magically wrought by the Chief Magus Okomfo Anokye.



The insight being conveyed here is how, faced with the problem of internal and external dangers coupled with the anxiety of impending political disintegration, the Akan priests/witch-doctors mirror an inverted (degenerated) image of the pristine Asante myth of origins, by rekindling Okomfo Anokye's ancient magical strategy of spiritual mystification. The only difference here is that the religious mystification that is re-enacted by the bogus priests is divested of its sacredness and is saturated with the sacrificial blood and the abominable mutilation of innocent slaves. Their aim, it is clear, is merely to conceal their own impotence. Thus, the priests tell the Asantehene that the gods want the blood of healthy young people. And when this does not allay the fears of the Asante Royal House, the charlatans masquerading as priests devise tortures for two sacrificial slaves whose cheeks and tongues are to be pierced with barbed arrows. The gods' acceptance of the sacrifice, the Asantehene is told, depends on how long it takes the victims to die. If they die quickly then the enemy will be halted. If the reverse occurs, then it is time for funeral songs:

They [the priests] ordered two slaves selected for sacrificial deaths. One tried desperately to save himself from death ... He invoked all the names of the royal ancestors of Asante, from Oti Akenten to Kwaku Dua. He begged the queen-mother as a mother to save a son. To stop his pleading tongue an executioner drove a short arrow into his left cheek and through his tongue, until the iron barb at the arrow's tip came out through the right cheek.... the victims were taken away from the town, into the forest near the Swamp of the Dead, with the iron barb skewering their cheeks. Thus bleeding, they were tied fast to two trees and left to die at their own speed. (p.251)

The complexity of the novel's thick sacred grove whose meaning is lost to those without the ritual passwords is again confirmed by "the deep-seated dread of a slave's curse" which compelled the Asante executioners to render the sacrificial slave victims dumb by driving short arrows through their cheeks and tongues before sacrificing them to the impotent gods of Asante tyranny. Izevbaye (1990:134) explicates this demonic ritual-cum-ideological censorship as follows:

In "The Executioner's Dream", for example, Kwesi Brew re-creates the deep-seated dread of a slave's curse in the pre-colonial Ashanti Kingdom. This fear gave rise to a cruel ritual during which the slave's tongue was transfixed before his execution to prevent the utterance of a final curse that could be fatal to his executioners. Although the practice is shrouded in ritual and a belief in the active force of the spoken word, it requires no special imagination for one to see that such a practice had a rational basis, not only as a projection of the despot's guilt, but also as a pre-emptive strike against a potential agent of propaganda against the

state. (Izevbye, 1990:134)

Izevbye's comment not only endorses the thrust of *The Healers* – that traditional African rituals and customs presented by the ruling élite as pristine cultural values created for the welfare of the larger community are nothing but lies fabricated by the corrupt tyrants for perpetuation of their fouled warrior-kingship – but also re-affirms the mythic Akan background of the novel. The driving of arrows through the cheeks and tongues of the slaves about to be sacrificed, which appears to be an imaginative invention, turns out to be a ritual motif from Asante's cruel and tyrannical past. The villainy of kingship and destructiveness of slave culture appear to have reached a zenith in the Asante Empire. There is the persistent view that the fall of the Asante nation stems from the irredeemable rottenness and destructiveness of institutionalized slavery in Asante. The Asante nation has become a monstrous evil forest covered with centuries of decomposed bodies of slaves slaughtered for impotent gods by impotent quacks posing as priests.

The purpose of Armah's project is brilliantly articulated by Stephen Slemon in his illuminating article, "Monuments of the Empire" (1987). The revised insight makes the thrust of *The Healers* transparent if we substitute "the Asante myth of origins" for Slemon's "allegory". Thus the Asante myth of origins magically created by the fabulous priest/magus, Okomfo Anokye, "becomes a site upon which post-colonial culture(s) seeks to contest and subvert colonialist appropriation through the production of a literary, and specifically anti-imperialist, figurative opposition or textual [counter-] *cultural-discourse*" (1987:11). The novel's postcolonial ploy constitutes a radical counter-hegemonic discourse which eschews European historiography grounded on recorded history, for a historical mode of interpretation based solely on orally-transmitted historical sources. Wole Ogundele's view in his article "Orality versus Literacy in Mazisi Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great*" articulates this trend of rivalry between the Western literary tradition and the African oral culture as follows:

For a small minority, however, two traditions exist in a state of rivalry, and literature is more or less equated with history. Mazisi Kunene and Okot p`Bitek are the champions of this view; for them oral literature is superior to written literature in all its ramifications and the earlier the African artist returns to it, the better. Their view represents a brand of cultural autonomy in which literature is the sum-total of history and culture, and yet somehow bears no structural relationship with other spheres of contemporary African experience and

awareness. (Ogundele, 1992:9)

Ogundele's observation helps clarify Armah's narrative strategies. The reflexive self-alienating narratorial intrusion which opens this novel – an overt rejection of the Western literary tradition – is now extended to cover historical interpretation. The text is self-consciously engaged in a systematic re-Africanisation of historiography. By re-interpreting Asante history purely through its myth of origins, Armah seriously questions the claim that the Western world is the keeper of universal treasures of knowledge. The novel projects its concept of history by asserting that history not only manifests in written records but also in oral forms. It is also intimated that the recorded sources are always tainted either with indigenous official biases or with alien imperialist ideology which undermine its objectivity.

In this deconstructed version of Asante history, Armah reveals his unique concept of history and attempts to re-write Akan history and to reject the European hegemonic interpretation of African history. Walter Benjamin's concept of history and the historian's "gift of fanning the spark of hope" (1985:255) illuminates not only Armah's notion of Africa's history but also the recurring ray of hope which permeates Armah's novels – a faint hope which is rejected by critics for its alleged lack of historical referent. Armah's obsession with the African legendary tradition which celebrates villains strutting as Messianic heroes is eloquently elucidated by Benjamin's *Illuminations* (1985). This view is gilded by Benjamin's insight – "The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist" (1985:255). In contemporary Africa, as George B. N. Ayittey has iconoclastically shown in his *Africa Betrayed* (1992), Africans who expose "the truth about Africa and the betrayal of the freedom for which the people of Africa struggled" are treated as 'Antichrists', "liquidated, jailed or exiled" (1992:11) by the modern African "Messiahs".

This deterministic and self-consciously traditionalised version of African history is again demystified by Armah's own comment on historiography (Armah, 1984:41):

In colonial Africa, this tendency took protean forms: in historiography, for example, Western hegemonism created the fashion according to which the only genuine history was the history of Westerners in Africa; the West was supposed to have brought Africans into the stream of history by colonizing Africa.

Clearly, this reveals the ideological and the didactic impulse which informs and shapes *The Healers*, particularly its reliance on the Asante myth of genesis for its re-interpretation of the fall of this empire. This is the novel's most powerful anti-imperialist orientation. Armah's stylistic programme, it must be reiterated, is a two-pronged literary weaponry which smashes both the British colonizers and the indigenous power-drunk tyrants together with their cohorts. Armah adopts a rather ambivalent and ambiguous posture towards the Asante myth of origins mystically crafted by the legendary Magus Okomfo Anokye. Thus, although the novelist is charmed by the great myth of genesis which exploited magic instead of wars of conquest for creating the Asante Union, he criticizes it for being centred around cabalistic mystification. Obviously, Armah's Janus-faced creative purpose leads to contradiction in his agenda. *The Healers* contends that the Asante myth of origins is historically flawed and that this original weakness continues to be exploited by the Asantehenes. The foundations of the Asante Empire, the text maintains, were laid by Okomfo Anokye, the cunning expert in occult arts, who knew how to manipulate his people's inherent addiction to the supernatural.

Okomfo Anokye created, through an uncanny cabalistic deception, an empire which lasted for nearly two centuries before the magic began to wear off. The text posits that Okomfo Anokye's clever ruse worked as long as the Asante community believed in its efficacy. One pertinent point needs to be re-emphasized: Armah argues that Asante history and its myth of origins are inherently marred from its birth, because the Union of Asante divisional chiefs, the superstructure of the Asante Empire, is built upon Okomfo Anokye's magical-cum-political fraud – an ingenious mystification which fools the independent chiefdoms into surrendering their political freedom. Paradoxically the political *modus operandi* exploited by all Asantehenes is to mystify all enacted laws and present them as Okomfo Anokye's first sacrosanct legal and cultural codes. Over a period of time, Asantehenes introduced all kinds of tyrannical and cruel measures which they claimed to be laws/customs that were originally created by Okomfo Anokye. Similarly in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah captures how King Koranche manipulates the traditional initiation in fooling the initiates into going into dark womb of the slave ship where they are sold into slavery.

Thus Okomfo Anokye becomes a mythical sacrificial motif – a ritual carrier who bears centuries of politically- and morally-fouled burdens of the corrupt and tyrannical Asantehenes who took

over from Osei Tutu, the first Asantehene. This thesis is confirmed by McCaskie, who asserts that "the political dissonances of the last quarter of the nineteenth century are essentially attributed to a wilful flouting ... of Komfo Anokye's societal axioms" (1986:331). The fall of the *kum* tree is a symbolic explosion of the myth of origins which in turn signifies the death of the Asante Union. *The Healers* contends that the Asante Empire died with the fall of the sacred *kum* tree which is the spiritual embodiment of the empire. What Wolseley and his soldiers claim they have conquered is only the decayed remains of a mummified empire that had shattered into smithereens. The work's manipulation of the reaction of the Asante Royal House to the British invasion confirms, further, that Asante is symbolically dead before the British attack and that this demise is triggered by inner rot and is self-inflicted. V.U. Ola elucidates and confirms my interpretation in her "The Feminine Principle and the Search for Wholeness in *The Healers*" (1985) as follows: "In *The Healers* in particular, much of the wound is inflicted not by colonialism, but by that process of self betrayal for which Armah never ceases to hold Africa accountable. The wounds are inflicted by kith and kin jostling for power" (Ola, 1985:75).

Asante's spiritual death which is symbolized by the swallowing of the totemic porcupine by the silver python and the fall of *the sacred kum tree* is now rationally confirmed by the text. The re-affirmation of the demise is projected through the Asante Royal House's sabotage of Asamoa Nkwanta's battle plan of defence against the British invading army. This view is powerfully endorsed by Derek Wright when he concludes in his "Critical and Historical Fictions" that "advised by his mother ... the Asantehene is persuaded to sabotage Asamoa Nkwanta's plan and throw in his lot with the whites: thus he destroys his kingdom to keep his crown" (1988:75). The moral stench of African kingship, *The Healers* maintains, stems from the fact that its basic foundation is nourished by pseudo-supernatural legendary tradition which projects the kings as divine supremos ordained to rule – a divine kingship fed by the innate superstition of the ruled. The weakening of this inherent superstitiousness of the African, it is intimated, signals the crumbling of African kingship rituals. McCaskie confirms this perception when he declares that "Aggression, quirkiness, apparent self-sufficiency and defiance in Asante history are methods of bombastic disguise" (1986:330). The flawed origins of Asante kingship, the novel contends, makes the system highly vulnerable to alien conquest and domination.

Like *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* is dismissed by some critics for being unrealistic and unhistorical. Izevbaye delimits the relationship between art and reality and defines "art as an illusion of reality". What has occurred in this novel endorses Izevbaye's definition. In *The Healers*, art becomes reality cloaked in the illusion of fiction – a situation in which the real cultural living world of the Akans is masked in art. The reader who is uninformed of the Akan heritage (even though he is an Akan) might perceive fantasy while there is none because the cultural reality and history of the Akans are ingeniously enshrouded in a marvellously seductive fiction. It is interesting to note that Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother* employs the same device – concealing facets of Ewe existential realism within the garb of fictional illusion. Some of the flamboyant and ravaged destitute who inhere the fictional world of this novel happen to be real men who either lived or are still living in Keta (Ghana), where I once lived. The author does not even bother to mask the names of ABOTSI, and BENEZA, whose real life situations are manipulated by the novel (Awoonor, 1972:68-74). But Armah enigmatizes and veils his sources in fictionality by refurbishing his inherited material and forms and by renaming the original sources through a creative process of abstraction. Thus the work which Lindfors dismisses as "a comic-strip history" not only teems with multifarious facets of Akan ethnohistory and iconography but also incorporates a myriad of Akan oral traditions and metaphysics.

Perhaps the basic root cause of the gross misreading<sup>6</sup> of this novel stems from its elusive surface simplicity which conceals the text's labyrinthine Akan ritual and cabalistic backdrop, bordering on a complex ethnohistory. To crack open the complex Akan iconographic background of *The Healers* requires what Frank Kermode describes in his *The Genesis of Secrecy* as "the circumcised ear" (1979:3). The novel's manipulation of traditional religious forms and motifs invokes multi-dimensional ritual fancy which conceals the deeper insights from outsider, creating a situation in which the iconic gems of the text are more likely to remain a closed door to uninitiated insiders and outsiders unwilling to exploit the skills of the iconographer.

## NOTES

1. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers: An Historical Novel* was first published by East African Publishing House in 1978. All subsequent page references (in brackets) are taken from the 1979 Heinemann edition.

2. Ayi Kwei Armah appears to be indigenising and reclaiming Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* which he admires and describes as "a masterpiece" in his essay entitled "The Definitive *Chaka*" (1976:10-13). We must also recall that in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah restores Mofolo's Isanusi, who has been described as "a diabolical sorcerer" by Eurocentric critics, to the position of supreme seer and visionary, who leads the initiates in that novel. In *The Healers*, Armah again invokes Mofolo, just as the Greek bard does invoke the Greek Muses, to aid him in his crafting of the novel. Neil Lazarus in his article, "Implications of Technique in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*", confirms this interpretation as follows: "In *The Healers* Armah presses forward with his project, formally initiated in *Two Thousand Seasons*, of recuperating and more specifically 'traditionalising' Mofolo's work ... The appeal to Mofolo is more than incidental. My own belief is that to a certain extent – and above all with regard to the characterization of Densu, his chief protagonist – Armah's technique in *The Healers* is consciously modelled on that of the Sotho author in his great historical epic *Chaka*" (1982:495-496).

3. "*Adamfo*" is an Akan word which means "a friend".

4. In his *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (1980:39), John Hope Franklin exposes the ancient institution of slavery in Africa as follows:

Slavery was an important feature of African social and economic life. The institution was widespread and was perhaps as old as African society itself...Slaves were usually regarded as the property of the chief of the tribe or the head of the family...Some, however, were sold and exported from the country, while others were sacrificed by kings in the worship of their royal ancestors (p.21).

The role of the chiefs in the institutionalization of slavery is further demystified by Franklin as follows :

The usual procedure was to go to the chief of the tribe and to make arrangements with him and to secure "permission" to trade on his domain. The chief, after being properly persuaded with gifts, then appointed various assistants who were at the disposal of the trader. Foremost among these was the caboceer, who assumed the responsibility of gathering up those to be sold - *at prices previously agreed upon between the trader and the chief*. [Italics mine]

5. V.U. Ola eloquently asserts this view in her article entitled "The Feminine Principle and the Search for Wholeness in *The Healers*. *Ufahamu* 14, 3 (1985), p.75.

6. In his article "Armah's Histories" (1980), Bernth Lindfors curtly dismisses *The Healers*. Lindfors describes novel as "a modern secular version of *The Pilgrim Progress*" (Lindfors, 1980:92), "cartoon ... comic-strip history" which is a "good cops-and-robbers, cowboys-and-Indian stuff" (Lindfors, 1980:95). Lindfors continues his critical vituperation on *The Healers* by asserting that the novel is "basically ... juvenile adventure fiction of *The Treasure Island* or *King Solomon's Mines* ..." type (Lindfors, 1980:95).

## Chapter Eight

### A Conclusion: The Thematic Unity of the Novels

The five novels of Armah which have been examined, as this study has revealed, are preoccupied by one dominant thematic concern: Africa's betrayal by its own ruling elites. In the corpus, Armah projects a vision of a world gone mad with greed and power. My analysis of the five novels has unearthed a persistent resurfacing of the same themes – a novelistic characteristic which unifies the corpus. While *Two Thousand Seasons* probes the prehistoric origins of the derailment of Africa's aboriginal flow of history – a creative and ideological purpose further intensified in *The Healers* – the three novels set in postcolonial Africa, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* investigate the impact or the effects of this racial holocaust on the African Continent. To hammer home his intended message in the novels, Armah isolates and identifies the various fabrics of political leadership in Africa from the prehistoric times to the present for his satirical assault and indictment.

*The Beautiful Ones* introduces the theme of the rapacious exploitation of the disenfranchised masses who, like the Man, the sweeper and the latrine carriers – the ostracized class of Ghana – toil endlessly while the ruling elite symbolized by Koomson benefit from their tireless industry. The castigation of the ruling elite presented to us when Africa's corrupt leaders are presented as moronic tyrants and pervers resurface in *Why Are We So Blest?*. In this text, Armah repudiates the leadership of Africa's freedom fighters and divests it of its bogus glory. The novel projects the leaders of African revolutionary nationalist liberation movements as selfish political personages who exploit the militant cadres solely for enjoying luxurious lifestyle while the poverty-stricken populace wallows in mud. Armah continues his repudiation of African rulers in *Fragments*. In *Fragments* Armah focuses on the African leaders' proclivity towards their close collaboration with Euro-American companies in order to exploit their own people. The unparalleled height of Armah's demonic anger towards the endemic corruption of African leaders, however, is achieved in *The Beautiful Ones*. In this work, cosmic political ineptitude and depravity of Africa's political leadership has created a world so foul that it is compared to a diabolically enormous pit latrine populated by human maggots.



*Why Are We So Blest?* continues the corpus's denigration of African rulers where *Fragments* has left off. By representing the ordinary freedom fighters who are consumed like fuel in the process of pushing the massive social truck which needs to be pushed uphill, Armah postulates that the ordinary fighting militants are tools which are used and destroyed while their leaders, who never see the battle fronts, enjoy the fruit of their labour. This thematic concern permeates both *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*. In the second novel the corpulent Principal Secretary and the hordes of the ruling elite are portrayed as Black neo-colonialist agents and manipulators who collaborate with international multinationals in order to exploit the masses for their own eternal enjoyment.

In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah disentombs the respected heads of the progenitors of ancient Africa and parades them as despots and miscreants unfit for glorification as the fabulous legendary figures who inhabit Africa's historical terrain. To effect his disembowelment of the godlike kings of Africa, Armah parodies the epic genre. Using parody-cum-caricature, the author divests Africa's fabulous god-like kings of their bogus self-deification and fabricated glory. Armah maintains that the marvellous legends of the past are nothing but fabrications that were ideologically created by the griots, whom he treats as literary prostitutes who sell their services to powerful men for crumbs from the tables of tyranny. The novelist presents the legendary tradition of bombastic praise singing as an index of racial infancy. Instead of the exaltation which follows the epic climactic alerts, Armah uses the panegyric for condemnation of the hollow tyrants and for lamentation of "two thousand seasons" of slavery and destruction, perpetuated by the indigenous Akan-slave kings and their mentors, the European "destroyers" and the Arab "predators". The text insists that the Black people must endure this holocaustic period before they can find reprieve.

Like in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah isolates the Fante kings and the Asantehehens for castigation in *The Healers*. The text begins its vilification of the Akan kings by dismissing the fawning slave behaviour of the Fante chiefs. We are told that in order to indulge their obsession for hot European liquor, the monarchs of the Fante Kingdom have allied themselves with the British invaders and promise to contribute Fante men to fight side by side with General Garnet Wolseley against the Asante. In *The Healers*, Armah exploits the demonic murder of Prince Appia

(who is meticulously mutilated by Ababio after he has been butchered by Kwao Buntui) in order to convey his intended message: the diabolical evil nature of ancient Africa's ruling elite. As if this not enough, the author links the bloody savagery of the thoroughly corrupt, weak and timid Fante monarchy with the bombastic and tyrannical Asante Empire. The text then isolates for condemnation Asante's foul slavery and demonic slaughter of slaves as human sacrifices. Armah achieves this by representing the Asante Empire as a monstrous forest of stinking decomposed bodies of slave victims sacrificed to the Asante gods – the smelly *Subin, the Swamp of Death* (p. 235), whose foul stench makes Densu vomit.

The *abiku* motif emerges as another stylistic patterning which Armah manipulates in unifying the material in his five novels. In *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah introduces a mystified *abiku* like he does in *Why Are WE So Blest?* and *Two Thousand Seasons*. This interpretation is confirmed by Wright in his essay, "Tradition and Vision of the Past in Armah's Early Novels" (1985). Wright posits that Ghana is doomed to suffer the evil cycle of *abiku*. The critic declares that "Teacher depicts the new Ghana and its Independence regime, born out of the war [World War II], as a violent death-child, an Akan 'amomawu', doomed to its repetition of premature deaths" (Wright, 1985:86). At best, the excretory birth through the latrine hole may best be described as a heretical rebirth, which Lemuel A. Johnson likens to an *abiku* child and describes in his "The Middle Passage in African Literature" (1980) as "a growth whose stubborn metastasis is from 'branded womb to branded womb'" (Johnson, 1980:75). As in *The Healers in Fragments*, Araba, Baako's sister, suffers five agonizing *abikus* before giving birth to a baby son who is killed on the altar of crass materialism. In *Why Are We So Blest?* the victim of the debilitating effects of *abiku* is a man, Solo. By subjecting Solo to a mystified disease which destroys his ability to retain life-generating fluids which escape through all the apertures of his body, Armah ingeniously evokes the emotions of a woman suffering from *abiku*.

Like all the narrative and the thematic focuses of the corpus, this oral narrative technique resurfaces in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Abena's initiation dance becomes the mystified vehicle through which the *abiku* motif is exploited by Armah. By invoking the emotions of repeated abortions through body language and visual expressions, Abena projects the cycles of futility

which dogs Africa. This ritual symbol of *abiku* is elaborately treated in *The Healers* when Araba Jesiwa is submitted to the horrors of a full-blown *abiku*.

Another theme which evokes the thematic unity of the novels is the ray of hope of regeneration which permeates Armah's five novels. This promise of redemption and muted hope which is projected as the symbol of the green colour and the "single flower, solitary, unexplainable and very beautiful" – a symbolic signification of re-birth which closes Armah's most pessimistic novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* – finds its culmination in *The Healers*. This vision of united Africa which is invoked by Ama Nkroma's "new dance of variegated crowd of Blacks" (p. 309) evokes Nkrumah's vision of the United States of Africa (the OAU). Not unlike the other narrative features and themes of the corpus, this ray of hope for unified Africa is elaborately treated in *Two Thousand Seasons* when Anoa predicts that "two thousand seasons of slavery" will be terminated with freedom which will be brought about by the concerted efforts of the hunted. This view is conveyed by Armah as follows: "Their ["white destroyers from the sea"] reign is surely bound within the two thousand seasons of our oppression" (p. 205). This vision of the faint hope of rebirth is further reinforced by the initiates' defeat of the slave traders and their escape from the slimy world of slavery and reunion with Isanusi.

This stylistic patterning of muted salvation also reappears in *The Healers*. At the close of *The Healers* a strange alchemy of re-integrative force begins to unify the motley of the different ethnic soldiers General Wolseley brings from Africa and West Indies to help him defeat the Asante Empire. As soon as the Cape Coast celebration to send General Wolseley off to England ends and the British general departs, the moods of the diverse Black soldiers brought to fight the Asante change suddenly. "The stiff, straight, graceless beats of white music vanished. Instead, there was a new, skilful, strangely happy interweaving of rhythms, and instead of marching back through the streets the soldiers danced. Others joined them. They ... took their procession meandering through the streets of Cape Coast. All the groups gathered by the whites to come and fight for them were there and they all danced ..." (p. 308). This is the most unambiguous evocation of the muted hope or re-generation which permeates Armah's novels:

Here were Opobo warriors from the east, keeping at a distance from their neighbours from Bonni. Here were Hausas brought by Glover from the Kwarra

lands. Here were mixed crowds with men from Dahomey, Anecho, Atakpame, Ada, Ga, and Ekuapem. There were a few Efutu men, and numbers of Fantse policemen in ill-fitting new uniforms. Here tough, hardened Kru men from the west, Mande and Temne men from even further west, and the fierce Sussu men inseparable for their swords of war.

All heard the music these West Indians who had turned the white men's instruments of death to playing such joyous music. All knew ways to dance to it, and a grotesque, variegated crowd they made, snaking its way through the town

....  
Ama Nkroma continued to laugh. 'It's a new dance all right ... and it's grotesque. But look at all the black people the whites have brought here. Here we healers have been wondering about ways to bring our people together again. And the whites want ways to drive us further apart. Does it not amuse you, that in their wish to drive us apart the whites are actually bringing us work for the future?' (p. 309)

Although Armah powerfully portrays the destruction of the Akan world by Akan kingship rituals, he also projects a perception which suggests that there is a faint hope of Akan world's regeneration. This ray of hope which is tethered to Anoa's prophecy of "two thousand seasons of slavery" is an ongoing process which is rehearsed in *Two Thousand Seasons*. The invocation of the future emancipation which is explicitly treated in *The Healers* and *The Beautiful Ones* is vicariously alluded to in both *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Fragments*. In the third novel, Modin's function as a Promethean reverse crossover invokes this regenerative sensibility. *Fragments* also sustains the theme of future salvation when Armah exploits Dr Aggrey's folktale of "The Eagle and the Hunter", intimating that someday Africa will, like the eagle in Dr Aggrey's tale, discover its true identity and soar majestically into the sky. Perhaps I must point out the very ray of hope motif which unifies the thematic construct of the novels also emerges as a distinguishing feature. This view is conveyed by the fact that in *Two Thousand Seasons* the author's attempt at regeneration via the Way has failed while in *The Healers* it has succeeded.

The most pervasive stylistic patterning which unifies the material in Armah's novels and is again introduced to the reader in *The Beautiful Ones* is the eclectic symbol of the slave castle, which exercises an overwhelming power over the fictional landmarks that mark the landscape of the corpus. The image of the colonial slave castle epitomizes the diabolical role played by the slave traders, whose headquarters was the slave castle – a stronghold which was the residence of the colonial European governor and also served as the fort for holding slaves for shipment to the

Americas. Even in the first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah exploits the symbol of the slave castle. This interpretation is conveyed as follows: "After a youth spent fighting the white man, why should not the president [Kwame Nkrumah] discover as he grows older that his real desire has been to be like the white governor himself, to live above all blackness in the big old slave castle?" (p. 92). Like Kumuzu in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Nkrumah strains to live exactly like the European governor, intensifying Armah's indictment of African rulers' obsession with living like a European – a cultural malaise which is known in Ghana as *aborofosem*. The image of the castle also re-appears in *Fragments*. In this novel, the focalizer, Juana, who is a descendant of slaves from Puerto Rico, draws the reader's attention to how the blind rulers of Ghana have made the Christianborg Castle in Accra the official residence of the head of state of the Republic of Ghana. This view is substantiated by the narrator's own words: "Over in the far distance, she could see the white form, very small at this distance, of the old slave castle which had now become the proud seat of the new rulers, the blind children of slavery themselves" (p. 30).

Armah continues his eclectic manipulation of the symbol of the slave castle when the narrator tells us in *Why Are We So Blest?* of how Kwame Nkrumah, like Kamuzu in *Two Thousand Seasons*, installs himself in the slave Christianborg Castle in Accra after renovating and luxuriously refurbishing it to the tune of two and half million British pounds. Nkrumah achieves his cherished aim of living exactly like the British Governor, Sir Charles Noble Arden-Clarke, by declaring independent Ghana a republic. Nkrumah's self-installation in the castle amounts to his becoming tainted like the British Governor, who was the chief slave factor. By his action, Armah insists, Nkrumah continues the rule of servitude and tyranny from where the European governors have left it off.

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah makes Kamuzu install himself in the slave castle after the defeat and the killing of the European governor by Isanusi and the initiates, helped by Kamuzu. The text strains to convey the view that Kamuzu's self-installation in the castle, his take-over of the governor's left-overs and his seizure of the governor's bloated wife and his fatal attempt to become a carbon copy of the European governor suggest that nothing has changed. Like the governor, the European chief slave factor, Kamuzu has become the Black chief slave factor, who

will ensure that the slave trade continues uninterrupted. Kamuzu's turning the slave castle into his residence also re-echoes that of Nkrumah's self-installation in the Christianborg (Slave) Castle – a political blunder which repeatedly permeates Armah's other four novels. The image of the slave castle resurfaces in *The Healers* too. This symbolic patterning is exploited by *The Healers* when King Ababio of the Fante Kingdom of Esuano sends his henchman, Kwao Buntui, to the Cape Coast Castle in order convey to General Garnet Wolseley his desire to become a British ally. We are further told of how the yes men, the Fante kings, hold a durbar before the Cape Coast Castle with a view to asking General Garnet Wolseley to invade the Asante, the traditional enemy of the Fante. In this novel the slave castle plays the role of the fountain of the fawning slave culture in Fante land.

The theme of parasiticism which Armah introduces to the reader in *The Beautiful Ones* is vicariously elaborated upon in the rest of the corpus. Thus in *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah portrays the Koomsons and the Nkrumahs as human maggots who live on the spoil from their corrupt earnings. Koomson's fatty and oily physique and his difficulty of pushing his obese body through the latrine hole at the close of the novel and the mountain of flatulence which he releases before finally going through the shit hole sustains the view of his parasitic embodiment. The thematic focus of the masses of Africa being turned into tools to be exploited by the ruling elites, the parasites, is further explored in *Fragments*. In this novel, Armah manipulates the creative ploy of cargo cultism in his attempt to project the vision of how the extraordinary hero or the been-to is perverted to function as a conveyor belt for transmitting wealth and goods for the eternal enjoyment of the hero's family. This critical formulation represents the families as parasites who live on the productive labour of the been-tos. The disfigurement of the ruling elite is intensified in *Why Are We So Blest?* when Armah dismisses the leaders of Africa's freedom fighters as bloated parasites who send the militant cadres to the battle fronts where they are crippled and killed by colonizers while they luxuriate in posh offices enjoying opulent lifestyle. The third novel insists again and again that the nationalist revolutionary liberation leadership continues to maintain the class structured system in which the dispossessed masses live in ramshackle shacks while their leaders live in the palatial houses vacated by the departing colonizers and build future houses on the same class-oriented basis. The theme of parasiticism which Armah initiates in the first novel is eclectically exploited in *Two Thousand Seasons* when men turn women into tools who produce

the plenitude during the reign of women. *Two Thousand Seasons* maintains that men have become obese and lazy because they leave all types of production of food and building of huts to women. In *The Healers*, Armah continues to manipulate this creative device by projecting both the fat oily priests and Asantehenes as parasites who enjoy the ceaseless productivity of the slaves and the disinherited masses.

This is not all. The imagery of demonic anger, the creative technique of *in medias res*, pejorative metaphor and ironic reversals which are compounded by scatology and dystopian symbolic metaphor and are pushed to unprecedented heights in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* resurface in embryonic forms in *Two Thousand Seasons*. The narrator in *Two Thousand Seasons* attempts to cleanse the moral murk in which the godlike kings have covered Africa by deploying a ritualized style structured around the profane. The reader gets the distinct impression that the narrator intends to purify the spiritual and physical rot with verbal rot, a traditional narrative mode akin to the ritualistic carrier motif in which moral and spiritual filth is carried ritualistically at the end of the year by a chosen victim. In Robin Horton's own words, the ritual carrier ceremony is "means of getting rid of the weakening of load of [moral and spiritual] pollution which results from the accumulated taboo-breaking of the past year" (Horton, 1960: 259).

This grotesque caricature of the ruling elite structured around foul language, which is inaugurated in *The Beautiful Ones*, is rehearsed in the rest of the novels. In *The Beautiful Ones* Armah has gone as far as to exploit the imagery of scatology in order to hammer home his didactic message. The theme of recurrent historical follies which Armah first manipulates in *The Beautiful Ones* is discussed in *Two Thousand Seasons* and rehearsed in *The Healers*. In the fourth work, the political blunders of the prehistoric caretakers are repeated by the despotic and depraved Akan slave kings. These demonic political catastrophes which are sketched by Armah in *The Beautiful Ones* and resurface in *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* and the rest of the corpus with monotonous predictability.

Thus Armah maintains in *Why Are We So Blest?* that nationalist revolutionary liberation leaders, who are traditionally believed to be morally pure and selfless politicians, turn out to be like the corrupt and autocratic contemporary leaders of Africa. To translate his vision that the political

culture of the leadership of Africa's freedom fighters – a political culture of tyranny and exploitation of the disinherited masses – is not different from that of the corrupt and kleptomaniac postcolonial rulers of Africa, Armah manipulates psycho-eroticism and centres his plot around the failure of the Algerian liberation wars in *Why Are We So Blest?*. The tendency of the leaders of nationalist liberation politics to send their militant cadres to the war fronts where they are crippled and killed by colonizers, while the leaders laze about in plush officers savouring the life of opulence, is virulently repudiated by Armah in this novel. Like the novelistic histories, Armah has not forgotten to target the Western powers for their neo-colonialism, which is invoked by the destructive potentials of Western education. The thesis of vilification of African rulers, which is the focus of this study, is elaborated upon by *Fragments*.

In his second novel, *Fragments*, Armah's satirical targets include Africa's political leadership and the intelligentsia. In *Fragments*, while Asante-Smith, the Principal Secretary and Akosua Russel represent the sterile Africa's intellectuals, who are mentally and academically bankrupt, Henry Robert Hudson Brempong, the businessman who is addicted to the acquisition of European gadgets, is portrayed as the walking parody of Europe and the European. Baako, the embattled protagonist, becomes the conveyor belt for material wealth. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah's first novel, emerges as the most caustic indictment of Black Africa. The diabolical corruption mounted by African rulers creates a foul cosmos in which bribery and corruption become the accepted ways of life.

Another major issue which needs to be discussed is the clash between Armah's representation of neo-colonialism in Ghana during the Nkrumah era and the actual political career of Nkrumah. The question to be confronted is whether Nkrumah established a neo-colonial government which was indistinguishable from the British colonial administration as Armah maintains in his postcolonial novels, particularly, *Fragments* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The actual political history of Ghana and Nkrumah's anti-neo-colonial role from 1957 till his death in 1972 seriously question Armah's thesis. This view is confirmed by Kwesi Jonah in his essay entitled "Nkrumah and Decolonization of Ghana's External Trade Relations 1956-1965" (1993). Jonah, the Ghanaian political scientist, argues that "The concept of neo-colonialism cannot be discussed without reference to Nkrumah, who perhaps more than anyone else, contributed to its



birth and development. In the second year of Ghana's independence, precisely in April 1958, Nkrumah, in his welcome address to representatives at the Conference of Independent African States held in Accra, warned that Africa had to contend with not only 'old forms of colonialism' but also the 'new forms of colonialism'" (Jonah, 1993:325). One classic incident which supports the thesis that Nkrumah resisted neo-colonialism and was no puppet leader who danced to the tune played by Western economic powers as Armah suggests is how he refused to comply with IMF's and the World Bank's demand to break all his trade relations with the Communist Block before his applications for loans could be granted (Jonah, 1993:334). This event which occurred in 1965 reveals Nkrumah as the mastermind behind Africa's attempt to demolish the West's economic and political stranglehold over Africa.

Also crucial to this investigation is the state of the educational system under the Nkrumah government. In *Fragments*, Armah suggests that education was neglected during the Nkrumah era. Armah juxtaposes an unfinished "NEW TECHNICAL SECONDARY SCHOOL" whose "foundations" were laid several years ago with the shining Texaco petrol dump (pp. 13-14) in order to sustain the vision of stagnation of the national educational system while European international companies experience unprecedented development and do booming business. The view that education was neglected does not convey the true state of affairs. When Nkrumah came into power in 1951, he established what was known as the Ghana Education Trust "with the purpose of building secondary schools and colleges all over the country". In his seminar paper entitled "Education in Ghana, 1951-1966" (1993), E. A. Haizel writes:

With funds provided by the Cocoa Marketing Board, Dr. Nkrumah founded the Ghana Education Trust with the purpose of building secondary schools and colleges all over the country. And before long, secondary schools and colleges sprang up from Hal Assini to Keta,<sup>1</sup> and from La Bone through Acherensua and Tamale to Tumu.

Under Nkrumah, secondary school facilities were expanded, both for the older schools and Ghana Education Trust schools. Sixth form facilities were expanded, commercial subjects found their way back on the curriculum, and "subject Association" began to flourish. The West African Examinations Council became the integral part of the education system. (Haizel, 1993:64)

What this clearly reveals is that education was not neglected under Nkrumah. Indeed, the quotation has demonstrated that Nkrumah's government either built a secondary school or a

college in every small town in Ghana. Perhaps I must add that had Nkrumah not imaginatively upgraded the educational system in Ghana and made primary school, teacher training and university education completely free, I would not have received either primary, secondary or university education in Ghana. There is no doubt about the fact that the Nkrumah regime made education accessible to the poor. Having dealt with the comparative analysis of Armah's fictional portrait and the political portraiture of Nkrumah, let us take a look at how Armah achieves the thematic unity of the corpus.

The most powerful creative technique Armah uses in his attempt to unify the material in the five novels – a narrative ploy which accentuates the theme of the organic wholeness of the corpus – is his brilliant manipulation of multifarious ironic reversals. Like Isanusi and his initiates in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Densu and General Asamoah Nkwanta in *The Healers*, Modin in *Why Are We So Blest?* and Baako in *Fragments*, in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* the Man is dogged by ironic inversions. Throughout his existential rite of passage the Man struggles to live above the decay and the corruption which strangle his world. It is ironic, therefore, that the Man becomes the butt of ridicule and ritual carrier for all forms pollution and agents of moral pollutants. This view is sustained at the opening of the novel when the bus conductor loads off his guilt-generated frustrations and fears unto the Man when he discovers that the watcher is, after all, only an impotent sleeper who cannot harm him. The Man's mother-in-law's verbal assault against the Man when Koomson refuses to share the profits of the fishing enterprise with her and his wife, Oyo's reference to the Man as the *chichidodo*, the bird which hates shit but feeds on maggots which live in the pit latrine and are nurtured on shit, are few of the examples of this stylistic patterning employed by the corpus.

The most graphic instance of the ironic reversal is the aftermath of the coup. Although the Man attempts to avoid Koomson, whom he regards as the most rotten symbol of corruption, Koomson takes refuge in the Man's house after the military takeover, releasing thunders of abominable flatulence which pollutes the Man's house. What is worse is the fact that the Man is forced to function as a ritual carrier and is physically and spiritually compelled to expel Koomson, the smelly shit-bag and the symbol of accumulated moral and physical pollutants, through the latrine hole and to carry this ritual pollution to a ritual dunghill, the sea. If we pull these pieces of this

stylistic patterning together, they will begin to look like a spiral. This naturally leads to one deduction: that Armah obviously exploits cyclic structure for his five novels. The vision of endless cycles of futility which permeates the corpus is achieved by his eclectic manipulation of this ironic negation – a narrative ploy which is designed to reinforce the thematic unity of the five novels and to sustain the vision of the inevitable “two thousand seasons of servitude and demonic despotism” Africa is doomed to endure before “the beautiful ones” finally are born.

This stylistic feature also reappears in *Fragments*. Like Modin in *Why Are We So Blest?*, Baako, the been-to protagonist, goes to USA where he studies creative writing in order to use his acquired skills in empowering the disinherited masses back in Ghana. On his arrival back at home, Baako soon discovers that the existing social structures in Ghana make such civic-oriented service impossible. Thus not only does Asante-Smith reject Baako’s screenplays but also the Onipa family declares him insane because he refuses to turn himself into a conveyor belt for transmission of cargo and wealth for their eternal enjoyment. Baako, therefore, is finally chased through the streets of Accra, roped in like a mad dog and incarcerated in a mad house. Baako’s ironic destination is the most memorable exploitation of this creative ploy.

The narrative device of ironic inversion resurfaces in *Why Are We So Blest?* too. In *Why Are We So Blest?* Modin, the been-to, who gets admitted into Harvard University on scholarship discontinues his Ph.D studies and embarks on a long journey into Afrasia, North Africa, with the purpose of joining the revolutionary freedom fighters – a course of action which invokes the Promethean reverse crossover. But like Prometheus, who fails to win the confidence of Man he sets out to help, he is rejected by the leadership of the revolutionary movement in Afrasia and dies a horrible death in the torrid vastness of the Sahara when he is brutally castrated with a piece of wire by demonic French soldiers. This ironic end is conveyed by the fact that Modin, who generates a promise of a great future, wastes his life and brings Africa no material and spiritual benefit.

As usual *Two Thousand Seasons* elaborates upon this literary device when the leaders of the Akan community in this novel mount a hazardous escape and migration through the treacherous vast wilderness of prehistoric Africa. Anoa’s people undertake this dangerous mission with the aim of

running away from the pernicious slavery and destructive tyranny imposed upon them by the diabolical Arab predators. By exploiting the barrenness and the un-regenerative attributes of the desert, Armah invokes the destructiveness of the desert – the home of the Arabs which is captured by the potent and powerful opening prologue of the novel. Armah writes: “Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving”. The symbol of the “springwater flowing to the desert” triggers the vision of the search for a new home. Such a home is found when Anoa’s people reach their final destination, a physical Garden of Eden, watered by a network of rivers, waterfalls, lakes, and all shapes and forms of water – the antithesis of the barren desert they have escaped from. This illusion of paradise and the notion of the mythical promised land is quickly dispelled by the omniscient narrator who sees the future: “The sand [desert] had brought us woe. Water, this same living, flowing water of the river itself, *water* would bring worse deaths to us” (p.58).

The huge situational irony projected by the text is the fact that Anoa's people associate the desert with death and barrenness while water symbolizes fruition and regeneration. The life-generating physical beauty of Anoa – “water hanging clear, water too open to hide the veined rock underneath, water washing pebbles blue and smooth black, yellow like some everlasting offspring of the moon, water washing sand, water flowing to quiet meetings with swift Esuba, to the broad, quiet Su Tsen, river washing you, Anoa, water washing you” – (pp.56-57) suggests regeneration and rebirth, an intimation of the end of the woes and enslavement perpetrated by the Arab “predators”. The narrator, however, maintains that there is no escape for Anoa's people. This view is conveyed in Armah’s own words as follows: “We came away from the desert's edge thinking we were escaping the causes of our disintegration. The causes running deepest were twin: among us had arisen a division between producers and parasites .... We came from the desert's edge thinking we were fleeing ruin, but its deepest causes we carried with us to new places” (pp.58-59). All these warnings of the future entrapments by new enemies foreshadow the arrival of the European invaders from the sea, the antithesis of the desert. All actions and movements in the novel lead to only one destination: cycles of futility.

The ironic reversals also appear in *The Healers*. The classic example of this creative ploy is the event in the courtroom in Esuano where Araba Jesiwa saves Densu from being sentenced to death

for Prince Appia's murder and exposes King Ababaio and his henchman, Esuman, the witch-doctor, who calls himself a priest, as the real murderers of Prince Appia. When King Ababio and Esuman are arrested and sent to Cape Coast for the trial for Prince Appia's murder, the stool of Esuano becomes vacant and is offered to both Araba Jesiwa and Densu, who refuse the offer. Thus the attempt by Araba Jesiwa, Densu and Damfo to stamp the evil cycle of kingship in Esuano comes to nothing. This ironic reversal suggests that the Akan world is fated to suffer "two thousand seasons of slavery and tyranny" predicted by Anoa.

The other instance of the ironic turn of events is how General Asamoa Nkwanta, who abandons his task of defending the Asante Empire, is finally persuaded by the Asante Royal House to lead an Asante army against the British invaders. As fate will have it, the plan devised by Asamoa Nkwanta to stop the British invaders and also to defeat them is sabotaged by the Asante Queen Mother, Efua Kobri. Thus the army commanders who are originally instructed to protect General Asamoa Nkwanta's back are asked by Queen Mother, Efua Kobri, to abandon their positions and the Asante Royal Family abandons Kumasi undefended for the British to capture it without firing a single shot. The Royal House behaves in this way because, owing to their inordinate desire for absolute political power, they prefer a violated Asante Empire to an inviolate one in which General Asamoa Nkwanta's victory makes him as powerful as the Asantehene.

## NOTES

1. The secondary school founded by the Ghana Education Trust in Keta, my hometown, is called the Keta Secondary School, which I attended.

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